Love in the Time of Corona

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Love in the Time of Corona

by Devereauxs_Disease

Summary

Will and Jack are wrapping up a case outside of Chicago when a shelter-in-place order strands them at their motel. Will is frantic trying to find someone to take care of his dogs. Alana is busy, but luckily her boyfriend volunteered to look after all seven of Will's dogs. Will sheltering-in-place show Will a different side to Hannibal? Or will the cannibal crack when the dog hair starts to pile up?

OR

Dev just really wanted to write a fic where Hannibal was trapped alone in a house with all of Will's dogs.

Notes

I promised my beloved Ishy a fic where Hannibal got stuck with Will's dogs...over a year ago? And I could never find the right set up to make the story work in my mind. Then 2020 came along and was like "HERE'S YOUR SET UP, WRITE!" so...I did. This goofy ass story is the result, and really Ish deserves all the stories for being the best, so I'm sorry this one is so late.

As always, thanks to Gwilbers for fixing all my atrocious errors.

See the end of the work for more notes

Day 1

Will let his head fall back and thump against the motel room door. “Shelter in place? Are you kidding me?”

Jack leveled a glare at Will. “You think I want to be in this motel for two weeks, Will?”

It wasn’t the worst place they’d ever holed up — but Will had seven dogs and had already begged the dog sitter to check in on the pack for an extra two days. Two weeks without his dogs at the Burr Ridge Econo Lodge with no one but Jack Crawford to talk to? Surely they could just buy masks and head for the airport.

“Aren’t we essential?” Will ran a hand through his hair. “We just caught a spree killer! Doesn’t that mean we can go home?”

“There are huge infection numbers in the area, it’s safer if we-”

“Safe? You just chased a man with a gun down a dark alley!”

“I’m not getting on a flight with god knows who-”

“Since when have you been afraid of a little virus, Ja-”

“SINCE MY WIFE STARTED CHEMO!” Jack frowned, looking down. He looked up and Will’s stomach twisted. He would have rather the man bellow and curse, seeing naked fear and sadness in Jack Crawford’s face was horrifying. “You do what you want, Will, our flight is canceled and I’m not booking a new one. You want to rent a car and drive home — you sort it out and submit the receipt.”

“Jack, I-”

“I need to make some calls.” Jack turned on his heel and pulled out his cell phone. Will stared at the man’s back, noting for the first time how hunched and tense his shoulders seemed. Will stalked off, pulling out his own cellphone.

“Hey, Alana? It’s Will. I know you’re teaching until the afternoon, but can you call me back when you’re out? I have a favor to ask…”

The door to number four at the Econo Lodge was propped open, Jack’s hulking frame sat at the end of the bed. Will paused in the doorway hand suspended mid-knock.

“…No baby, you know it’s not safe for me to do that. I called the hospital. There’s a service that can take you to the hospital so you won’t miss your treatments…Of course I’ll be bored…Sexting? What happened to good old-fashioned phone sex?” Jack laughed and it struck Will that he’d never heard him sound so light. “You better call me tonight, girl…And you save me some of that good kush, we’re having a party when I get ho-”

Jack looked up at Will, ten years immediately falling back onto his face as his expression hardened. “I’ll call you tonight, OK? Ciao, Bella.”

“You pay me to empathize with killers,” Will held out the plastic bag in his hand. “I forget to empathize with other people, sometimes.”

Jack raised an eyebrow. “You find a rental place?”

“Closed until further notice.” Will shook the bag. “Chicken place a few blocks over was still open. You hungry?”

Jack’s face softened just a bit. He moved to the small table in the corner of the room, pulling out a chair for Will. They tucked into their Dell Rhea’s chicken dinners for a few moments. Will snagged a napkin, wiping at his face.

“So…is Bella…”

“She’ll be alright. I wish I was there, but that woman’s never needed another soul to look after her a day in her life. She’d be the first to tell you that. She sure as hell is the first to tell me.” Jack huffed, mouth curling. “Doesn’t mean I don’t want to be there to make sure she’s OK.”

Will nodded to himself. The dogs needed him. They looked out for him, but at the end of the day, they looked to him as well. He fed them, he took them to the vet, he commanded them when they needed structure. He loved them, but what would it be like to love something that didn’t need to love him back? To love someone that chose him, not because they needed something from him, but because they simply wanted him beside them…

“You’re lucky,” Will mumbled, rubbing his eyes. He was picturing blood-red flowers on a cream piece of silk, but he couldn’t remember Alana ever wearing it.

“Damn lucky,” Jack agreed. He looked at Will for a moment. “You find someone to look in on the dogs? Alana?”

“Left her a message.”

Jack offered Will a sly grin. “Maybe you should call her again, see if she’s bored?”

“Seriously?”

“I’m bored!” Jack laughed. “What else do I have to do?”

Will stood. “I think I'll turn in. You want to get a cab in the morning? Maybe go to a grocery store, get some supplies?”

Jack nodded. “Call the girl, Will…check on your dogs.”

Will rolled his eyes and left Jack to waggle his damn eyebrows alone.

“What do you mean you asked Hannibal?” Will was doing his best not to sound hysterical, but he had a feeling he failed.

“I had a meeting! When we had dinner, you said you two knew where you were with each other!” Will remembered that dinner. Remembered the roast pig. Remembered glaring daggers at Hannibal but mostly wishing Alana would just leave him and Hannibal to sort themselves out alone.

“You gave Hannibal Lecter a key to my house?”

“He said he knew where the spare was…that he’d been there before?” Will could hear the faltering in Alana’s voice. “He said he’d taken care of the dogs before.”

The last time he fed my dogs, he gave them Mason Verger.

Will’s breath caught at the memory. The scent of blood was thick in the air, Hannibal watching him with dancing eyes as that little pampered pig tore his face off before them. He remembered his fingers itching, wanting to dig them into Mason’s cheeks, pull out a dripping piece of flesh and let Hannibal pull it from his fingers.

He hadn’t. He hadn’t participated, he had just observed. But he hadn’t gone to join Winston on the porch either.

When Hannibal had taken his prize back to the Verger estate, presumably to see if he could goad Margot into killing him, Will had found a scrap of flesh on the arm of his chair. It was surprisingly easy to chew. He let it sit on his tongue for a long time before spitting it out and burning the bloodied chair in the backyard.

“Will?” Alana’s voice found him again, irritatingly it banished the vision of Hannibal from his mind. “Will, you’re breathing funny. Are you OK?”

“Yeah, yeah…” Will licked his lips, pulling the lower lip between his teeth so he could remember the taste of flesh. “I just need to call Hannibal, check on the dogs.”

“I’m sure they’re fine, W-” He hung up without saying goodbye.

“Hello Wi-” A crash interrupted Hannibal’s greeting. He could hear Hannibal talking to someone, voice muffled. “How are you this evening?”

“Settled in place.” Will could swear he heard another thump. “Are you having a dinner party?”

“Gatherings of ten or more have been canceled, as you may know by now.” Something skittered in the background before another crash was heard.

“I, *uh*, was just calling to check on my dogs.”

“How kind of you to ask me about my dinner plans before asking for your pack. Nearly sociable.” Will could hear the amusement in Hannibal’s voice. He pressed his ear closer to

the phone. “They are all fed, though I may need to exercise them more thoroughly.”

“What did you feed them?”

“What do you think I fed them?”

“The last time you fed them, I had to burn the chair to destroy blood evidence.” Will wiped a hand over his mouth…was he smiling?

“Technically, Mason fed the dogs that day. Excuse me,” Another muffled bit of speech, Will strained as he heard what sounded like skittering feet again.

“Dr. Lecter?”

“I confess most of the things I found in your refrigerator could be classified as dog food, but I only took the tub labeled as such.”

“Took?”

“Ah, well,” Hannibal sighed. Will couldn’t remember him ever doing something so human. “Apparently the dog sitting service you employ is inessential and will be closed for the foreseeable future. Excuse me, Will — Harley I believe we’ve discussed my paws on the settee policy! — Forgive me, Will, where were we?”

Will blinked, he had a vision of his sweet brown lummox digging his claws into one of Hannibal’s sofas. He felt light-headed. “You took them to your house?”

“Ye — BUSTER! BE A GENTLEMAN! — Yes.”

“Wh-” Will licked his lips, his throat felt dry. “Why didn’t you just stay at my house?”

There was a scoff. “I may have to sequester myself for two weeks with seven dogs, but I refuse to do so in a home that has a range stove from the 1980s.”

Will could picture the haughty little chin raise that accompanied that statement. It made him smile. “Oh god, you loaded seven dogs into the back of your Bentley?”

“Six.” The sigh was back in Hannibal’s voice. “Buster refused to leave Ellie alone. I had to move him to the passenger seat so she could ride in peace. He settled quite nicely when I turned the heated seat on.”

Will could see it so clearly — six panting dogs spraying drool when they shook their heads, nails leaving lines in the supple leather seats, hair shedding onto every surface. Buster in the front, coiled into a contented ball on his own heated leather bed. Hannibal was in more trouble than he thought, and Will found the notion made him long to be home, to see the horrid wreck of Hannibal’s car and clothes himself. Will didn’t bother hiding the delight in his voice. “They’re going to destroy your house.”

“Once Buster learns to navigate the hardwood floors and ceases skidding into every wall in the house, I’m sure we’ll be fine.” Hannibal sniffed. “They’re just dogs, Will.”

Something mean and gleeful bubbled in the back of Will's mind. "Seven dogs are a lot of work, especially if they don't listen to you."

"They'll listen to me." The utter assurance in Hannibal's voice made Will laugh.

"Dr. Lecter?"

"Hmmm?"

"I'll forgive you for being an arrogant prick, but I won't forgive you if you kill the dogs."

There was a long silence, Will wondered if Hannibal was calculating the likelihood of killing the dogs in 14 days.

"I think that's perfectly reasonable. I'm glad we've established boundaries."

Will lay back on the bed. "You and I have a history of disregarding boundaries."

"And I believe we both know now that willful disregard was a mistake." Will frowned. It was an apology. Not a great one, but not bad for a psychopath. "I will be willing to abide by yours if you are willing to abide by mine."

"And what are your boundaries, Dr. Lecter?"

"I would like to call you once a day, should I have questions as to the care of the dogs. I shall send you text message photos if requested."

"Those don't sound like boundaries to me."

There was a hesitation, just a fraction of a second. "I'd like to talk to you as well, after the dog update. And be reasonably assured that Uncle Jack isn't listening over your shoulder."

"I-" Will felt the indignant response well in his chest, that he'd share Hannibal, bring Jack into the little world they had created. "I can do that."

"And," That hesitation again, Will felt his fingers clench at it. "I'd prefer if you'd call me Hannibal."

Will let his eyes fall closed. *Oh*.

He wanted that too. God how he wanted it. Will took a moment to steady his breathing, thanking god or the coronavirus for the fact that Hannibal couldn't see his flush or scent the slow-building flood of arousal.

"Yeah, OK," Will whispered. The silence between them built until Will realized that there shouldn't be silence. "Hannibal?"

"Yes, Will?" The rasp in Hannibal's voice sent a shiver down Will's spine.

“It’s quiet.”

“What?”

“Do you know where Buster is?”

“I don’t…he was just here…”

“I would go check your closet, especially if you have leather shoes on the ground.”

“Why would he…” Hannibal huffed as he ran up the stairs. Will waited, wincing slightly when he heard Hannibal’s sharp intake of breath. “BUSTER! How dare you — give that to me now! Drop it! Release! Let it g-ZOE DO NOT HELP YOUR BROTHER!”

Will ran a hand across his face. “Good night Hannibal.”

He hung up and smiled into his pillow.

Day 2

Chapter Summary

Hannibal takes the pack for a walk, Will gets some dishware.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will woke up to the sound of a text alert. He'd slept fitfully, kicking the covers off of himself and then shivering for hours. He groaned. Fuck Jack if he thought Will was going to talk to him before 9am.

Does Max have a dairy sensitivity?

Will blinked at the message. Then blinked again. He pulled up Hannibal's text and stared at it, willing to make the words make sense.

What?

The message was immediately seen and Will watched as three little dots began milling on his screen.

I'm trying to determine if Max has an allergy I was unaware of or if he did not like the texture of my panna cotta.

Will hit *call* on his phone. The first thing he heard was a cacophony of barking.

"Good morning W-"

"Are you trying to poison my dogs?"

"No, I was attempting to reward him for being the only dog who relieved himself in a timely fashion on our walk."

"Walk?" Will sat up. "You took all seven on a walk."

"If I'm being honest, it was more of a drag…I think Enzo can repair my trousers, though, and all of the bleeding was mild."

"Oh my god, Hannibal, just take them back to my place, I can find someone-"

"Since when has a little bloodshed caused me to end a friendship? I assure you we've all reached an accord." There was a sharp noise and most of the barking abated. Will smiled when he heard Winston's woof followed by Hannibal's annoyed sigh. "I was merely

inquiring about Max's dietary preferences because he was a good boy and — Buster, really, we've discussed the pawing."

Will covered his mouth, pressing his smile to his palm to keep the laughter in. "Don't give my dogs panna cotta, please."

"I did look up the ingredients, there's nothing poisonous to dogs in the-"

"It's crap." Will laughed at the annoyed hiss that statement received. "Dogs don't eat sugar and dairy like that, Hannibal."

"I gathered as much when it was vomited onto my damask throw pillow."

"He is still alive, isn't he?"

Hannibal sighed through his nose into the phone. "Yes."

"I could send you a recipe I use for dog treats sometimes."

"I would appreciate that; I need to venture to the store later."

Will groaned. Fuck. Jack.

"Yeah, I promised Jack we'd go grab supplies."

"Ah," Hannibal sounded a bit brighter. "It seems we will both be dragged about today."

Will snorted. "I'll send you the recipe."

"Thank you."

"And Hannibal?"

"Yes?"

"I'm sorry about the pillow."

"No, you're not."

Will grinned and hung up the phone.

Will was staring at a selection of hot plates when his phone buzzed again. There was a picture of Buster in the middle of a feather maelstrom.

Buster took care of the pillow before I could take it to the cleaners. Such a helpful boy, he reminds me of his father.

Will ran his finger over the picture before tapping out a quick response.

At least he listens to me.

The reply was immediate.

He'll have a new daddy soon enough.

Will had typed out *oh really* when a hand clapped on his back.

"How's Alana?"

Will looked up with wide eyes. He deleted his response and pocketed the phone. "Huh?"

Jack grinned, winking before grabbing one of the hot plates. "I saw that smile, Will, I know a good flirty text when I see one."

"N- no I was-"

"Took me a while to win Bella over too, but you'll get there." Jack turned the cart. "Come on, let's grab some canned soup before they're cleaned out."

Will followed behind Jack, his fingers still gripping his phone.

You'll get there.

He hoped so.

Will set up a makeshift kitchen in Jack's room, connecting hot plates and a water kettle on the little table. He stacked their bounty — a few cans of stew, some boxes of mac n cheese, instant coffee, milk, cereal, two six-packs of soda, five six-packs of beer, a jar of store-brand marinara, and a box of pasta Jack had to elbow a college kid for.

It wasn't exactly domestic, but it was the closest Will had come to playing house with someone since he lived with his dad. Distantly, he wondered what Hannibal had in his kitchen. Surely it was stocked full of people, grains, fresh herbs, and cooking implements that looked as though they belonged in a lab somewhere. He wondered if Hannibal would be easily distracted. If he could make a game of nibbling the doctor's ear just to watch his knife slip or kissing him until he forgot the fish was burning.

He smiled to himself as he set out the two Frozen 2 plates and bowls — the only dinnerware left in the entire aisle.

"Yes, we washed our hands when we got back." It was odd to hear Jack's voice so soft. Will knew before turning around that the man would be smiling into the phone. "No, we don't have masks, but we were — don't you tell me about dangerous! YOU WENT TO THE DISPENSARY IN AN UBER, BELLA! GOD ONLY KNOWS HOW DANGEROUS THAT IS! YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM IS-"

The female voice yelling right back almost made Will drop his Olaf cup. He couldn't hear the words, but the tone made his shoulders tense.

“DON’T YOU DARE HANG UP ON- BELLA? BELLA!” Jack smacked the phone down on the bed next to him. “Stupid fucking asshole.”

“I wouldn’t start with that when you call her back.”

Jack looked up, as if he just realized Will was in the room. He sighed. “I was talking about myself.”

Will raised an eyebrow. Jack shook his head. “She’s alone and she’s scared. And when she’s alone and scared she does what she always fucking does — she looks for something she can control. She can’t have her husband? She’ll do the shopping herself. She’s sick and in pain? She’ll pretend she’s not and take a fucking Uber to the dispensary for more pot.”

“And when her husband yells…”

“She yells right back and hangs up on his stupid ass.”

Will tilted his head. “Because she knows he’s alone and scared too, and there’s not much she can do about it but start a fight to distract them both.”

Jack squinted. “Unless you’re about to tell me I’m the Chesapeake Ripper, you can keep that amazing fucking insight to yourself. Now get outta here I gotta call my wife back and grovel and I don’t need an audience.”

Will smiled, holding up his hands. He snagged a beer and walked through the door connecting their motel rooms. He closed the door and listened for a moment.

“Hi baby, yeah…I-” Jack laughed long and loud. Will nodded to himself, pulling his phone from his pocket. He held his thumb over the text from Hannibal, considering.

With a huff, Will put the phone away. Flopping on the bed, he turned on the TV and opened his beer.

Chapter End Notes

Next Up:
Will and Hannibal talk about more than dog care.
The dogs don't find Hannibal that interesting.

Day 3

Chapter Summary

Hannibal gets some dog training advice, Winston would like to talk to an adult, and Jack might be right for once.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

How does one walk seven dogs without breaking a leg?

Will snuggled into the scratchy sheets of the motel bed and grinned at his phone, suddenly very warm. He could almost hear the voice echoing behind him in the cocoon of blankets.

They're just dogs, Hannibal.

Will rolled his shoulders letting pleasure surge through him when his phone rang a few seconds later.

"Hello?" Will tried to keep the smile from his voice.

"Do you always throw a man's shortcomings in his face, Will?"

"That's the way of the world, I'm afraid."

"Not with me."

"No, I imagine it's always a great surprise to you when someone finds one of your shortcomings."

"You seem to find them all."

"That's because I know where to look."

"What a horrible thing it is, to be seen so completely."

Will hummed. "Is it?"

"Only if it's followed by rejection, I suppose."

"Love you, love your faults?"

“No one can be fully aware of another human being unless we love them. By that love, we see potential in our beloved. Through that love, we allow our beloved to see their potential.”

“So, if I see you as a shitty dog walker, it’s OK, as long as I believe you can become a better one?”

“I shall live in hope.”

Will rolled onto his back, phone pressed to his ear. “First, I’m going to tell you that I usually just take them on a run through the fields.”

“Yes, well, there are leash laws and-”

“And you’re such a law-abiding citizen…”

“This morning Buster tried to tree a squirrel. Jack attempted to hump a fire hydrant and the rest danced about my legs as if I were a maypole. I would simply like to take the dogs outside without-”

“What state of mind were they in?”

“Excuse me?”

“Were they excited?”

“They’re dogs. They’re always excited.”

“Not if they’re focused on you. You can’t take them into the world until you’re confident that you can have their focus. Once they know to pay attention when you tell them to, you can do anything.”

Hannibal sniffed. “So, what you’re telling me is…they don’t find me that interesting?”

“Don’t worry, Hannibal, they will.”

“How’s Bella?” Will wandered into Jack’s room, immediately grabbing the box of Frosted Flakes from the dresser.

“Going for a walk around the block to get some fresh air,” Jack grumbled, holding out his Sven bowl for some cereal after Will poured his own.

“Isn’t that dangerous?”

“No, it’s not, and I should mind my damn business for asking,” Jack slumped in the chair, splashing milk into his bowl. “Also, if I hadn’t run off to chase my killers I’d be there and then maybe she wouldn’t feel so cooped up.”

Will sat across from Jack, watching as the bigger man glared at his cereal. “Must be irritating to be married to the one person who doesn’t snap-to when you bellow.”

Jack looked up at Will, eyebrow raised. “Why do you think I married her?”

“You picked the only person who doesn’t listen to you?”

“I picked the person who isn’t afraid of me.” Jack grinned to himself. “Marriage isn’t about picking someone who thinks you’re wonderful, it’s about picking someone who knows you, sees you, and loves you anyway.”

Will froze. He wanted to call Hannibal back. He wanted to throw his phone away and run as far as he could. Jack shook his head.

“It also doesn’t hurt to find someone who calls you on your bullshit.” The older man winked. “You remember that when you talk to Alana later.”

Will nodded, smiling around a mouthful of cornflakes. He thought about a motel breakfast in another life, the smell of seasoned eggs and mouth-watering sausage filling his nose. He’d been in boxer shorts that day too. Now he looked across the table at Jack Crawford in his boxers and tried to imagine sharper cheekbones and an elegant brown jacket over a beige sweater.

What a tame, subdued monster he’d had at his table that day. Will missed him terribly. He wondered if Hannibal ever ate cereal in his boxers at the table, if Will could cajole him into trying it as if it were some sort of illicit adventure. Will could see them crowded together at Hannibal’s massive table, hair in wild tufts and sleep creases still on their faces, chewing thoughtfully as they watched each other. Maybe he could tangle his bare legs with Hannibal’s, nudge him, earn a rare lopsided smile.

“Will?”

“Huh?” Hannibal faded and Jack reappeared. Will tried not to hold it against him.

“I said, what do you want to do today?”

The adventure will be yours and mine today.

Will slumped in his seat, the frosted flakes too sugary as he chewed. “We get any board games?”

Jack smiled, “We have Clue, Connect Four, Boggle, and a deck of cards.”

Will stretched, groaning as his spine popped. “Don’t we need more than two people to play Clue?”

Jack shrugged. “I can skype Bella?”

Will laid on his bed flicking through TV channels. After a dinner of beef stew and beer, he'd left Jack to chat with Bella. He could hear Jack's booming laugh through the thin motel walls. He thought about what Jack had said, about Alana, about finding someone who saw you, even when you didn't want to be seen.

Have you killed the dogs yet?

Will stared at his phone, smiling when the three dots at the bottom of the ap started moving.

Yes. It was a massacre, I'm afraid.

A picture popped up — elegant pinstriped legs crossed daintily at the ankle. Around the legs a pool of fur, six dogs stretched out toward the roaring fire.

Where's Winston?

He prefers to observe me from doorways.

Another picture: a blurry patch of golden-brown fur at the doorway of the study, ears peeked in interest, but paws firmly outside the room.

Will hit call.

"Good evening, Dr. Lecter's Dog Emporium."

Will barked a shocked laugh before sinking into his bed. "Sorry about Winston, he's…"

Got good sense.

"One wonders what you've been telling him about me."

"Nothing I haven't told the FBI." That wasn't strictly true. Will had never gotten blind drunk and told Jack he sometimes thought about Hannibal while jacking off in the shower. Though poor Winston probably hadn't wanted to hear about it either.

"Yes, well, that's quite heartening." Will could hear the crackling of the fire and the warmth of Hannibal's voice, suddenly the miles between them seemed to stretch to a nearly unbearable distance. "What have you been doing with yourself today, Will?"

"Had breakfast with Jack. Bumped into Jack for lunch, ran into Jack while watching a movie and you'll never guess who I had dinner with…"

"Hmmm, are you finding yourself in poor company, Will?"

"No…not," Will frowned. "I don't know, I got to play Clue with him and Bella today and he's not…"

"Did you find the man behind the monster, Will?"

“I never said he was a monster,” Will grumbled.

“But you saw him without the artifice he shows to the world?”

“It was odd, hearing him laugh so much.”

“Is he funny?”

“No, but Bella makes him laugh. She won four games in a row without being in the room. She told him she ought to make the big bucks chasing murderers around the country.”

“It sounds as though you’ve expanded your family again.”

“What?”

“Where once you had Uncle Jack, you now have Aunt Bella as well.” Will could hear the clink of a glass the delicate sound of a swallow.

“I don’t go around recruiting family members.”

“You do. I have seven of your children at my feet.”

“That’s different, that’s-”

“Love without expectation. You adore them, you offer them what they need, and in return, they offer you uncomplicated devotion.”

“You make it sound so…”

“So…what?”

“Transactional.”

“Isn’t all love transactional? You give of yourself in the hopes that your beloved will give to you.”

“No. That’s not what I want, that’s not-”

“What do you want, then, Will?”

Will stilled. He could picture the keen set to Hannibal’s eyes, the way his head tilted just before he struck at some emotional nuance Will tried to hide in the bone forts of his skull. Will had the sensation that Hannibal was peering into some open wound Will had thought long healed. “I-just…what everyone wants.”

“If you can’t bring yourself to voice your desires how will you ever hope to achieve them?”

“What do you want, Hannibal?”

“At the moment, an effective method for removing dog hair from upholstery.” Will laughed gratefully as some of the tension left his chest. “But in the long term, I want a partner who sees me completely.”

“And loves you anyway?”

A soft chuckle, Will’s eyes drooped at the sound, drowsy and content with Hannibal in his ear. “Yes, Will. That would be my preference.”

“I want that too,” Will whispered.

“Do you?”

“Wh-yes. Why wouldn’t I?” Will squinted at the phone.

“Because to see someone completely, to love them completely, you’d have to see yourself.” Will felt struck.

“I see myself.” Will snarled.

“You do.” Hannibal allowed. “And that’s why you take such pains to prevent others from seeing it.”

“N-no-”

“Tell me, Will, are you wearing your glasses today?”

Will frowned. He felt an impulse to snap, to strike at Hannibal for prying. He could feel the doctor’s fingers digging into vulnerable places and tearing. “I have to go.”

“I thought you might.” The tart note in Hannibal’s voice did nothing to soothe Will’s mood. “Goodnight, Will.”

“Goodnight.”

Will plugged in his phone and turned out the lights. He laid in the dark, letting the soft drone of the television drown out the buzzing in his ears. He didn’t want to hear it, the strong voice repeating over and over in his head. Not Hannibal’s voice, but Jack Crawford’s —

It also doesn’t hurt to find someone who calls you on your bullshit.

Chapter End Notes

Next Up:
Buster does some gardening, Jack does some relationship counseling, and Will offers a bit of trust.

Day 6

Chapter Summary

We jump ahead a few days. Buster jumps into the garden. Will jumps a little closer to his true feelings.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Days in quarantine began to blur as Jack and Will found a new routine. Will would wake to the ping of a text message notification, grin at whatever canine news Hannibal had supplied in the morning, and send a text back before stumbling into Jack's adjoining room in search of frosted flakes.

Today, Hannibal had woken him to a photo of Buster, completely black with caked soil, a whirlwind of torn vegetation at his paws.

IS THAT YOUR BACK GARDEN?

Will wondered if Buster was still alive, or if Hannibal was perusing Pet Finder trying to find a small terrier with similar markings that he could present to Will.

I'm grateful to Buster for challenging my complacency. It was time to reevaluate my garden.

Will pressed his smile into his pillow.

He's your favorite, isn't he?

Must I have favorites?

No. But you do. You like that he's a disobedient little shit. You like the loss of control.

A rather obvious pattern, now that you've pointed it out.

Will looked at the phone, heart beating rapidly. He wanted to hit call, wanted to hear Hannibal tell him more. Instead, he pecked out a response on the phone's keyboard.

I always saw myself as most like Winston.

Yes. I'm aware of your problems confusing fantasy and reality.

Will typed and deleted FUCK YOU four times before another message arrived.

Ms. Elinor has informed me it's time for a walk. Have a lovely morning.

Will didn't respond. He hoped Hannibal found it rude.

Will wandered into Jack's room after a cursory knock. Jack was in his customary outfit of boxers and an undershirt. He was softer looking now, grey whiskers taking over his chin and cheeks. He had talked to Bella before Will came into the room. Will could tell because of the set of his shoulders, the slight ease around his eyes.

Jack nodded to a ready-made cup of instant coffee next to his own. "Something happen with Alana?"

Will's hand hesitated before grabbing the cereal. "Don't you pay me to make the observations?"

Jack shrugged, stirring his own coffee. "Usually I don't have time to make them."

Will sat at the table, running his hand through his hair. "Do you miss it?"

"I was never as good as you. But I would tell you I don't miss reviewing budget reports and sitting in meetings about clearance rates." Jack smiled slightly. "I'm also not so rusty that I missed you changing the subject."

Will snorted. "It's nothing."

"Isn't it? Usually, you come through that door with that goofy grin on your face, cheeks all pink like you got passed a note in class."

Will glared at Jack over his coffee cup. "I liked you better miserable, bellowing, and overworked."

"Does that mean we're not having girl talk over breakfast?" Will sneered, but Jack shrugged. "What the hell else is there to do, Will? Watch some movies?"

"We could just enjoy the silence."

Jack grinned. "Small tiff? Or is it a real problem?"

Will sighed. "Told me something I didn't want to hear."

"Already sounds like a marriage to me." Jack laughed. He ate a few more spoonfuls of cereal. "The real bitch of it is when the thing they tell you ends up being true."

"Yeah, it is." Will sipped on his coffee. It was bitter and sickly sweet at the same time. Hannibal would have made Turkish coffee for him, dark and filling.

"Just a bit of friendly advice — you pay attention to the next bit of communication you have."

“What?”

“You get a cute little text or picture — something silly, maybe a picture of the dogs or a selfie — it’s their way of saying they’re letting you off the hook. You don’t text her back if you get that text, you call her and be sweet as pie. If Alana’s willing to let it go, you better be willing to say ‘Thank you’.”

Will thought of Hannibal sending him a selfie, hair tousled and lips pouting. He snorted into his coffee. “And if I don’t get that text?”

“Then you call and you grovel, Will.”

Will sighed and nodded. He had all day to figure out a good grovel.

Will had just about worked out the speech in his head. He would tell Hannibal that he was sorry and that he knew the doctor was going above and beyond caring for his dogs. He would also acknowledge that there was room for interpretation as far as which dog he was. He thought about asking if they could compromise and say he was most like Max, who liked to join Will in the river when he fished. A joke, anything to hear Hannibal laugh and ensure they could talk before Will went to sleep.

His phone pinged before he could find the courage to call. The picture from Hannibal was of a stack of neat bone-shaped cookies, all perfectly engraved with the dogs’ names. Around the plate were a few edible flowers and a sauce drizzled just so. Will felt warm to his toes as he looked at the image.

He hit *call* as he sat on the bed.

“Good evening, Will.”

“It’s cruel to text a man that when he ate Spaghetti-Os and beer for dinner.”

Hannibal made a sympathetic noise. “No dessert?”

“Jack flipped me for the last cold strawberry pop tart.”

“I have a feeling I don’t want to know what any of these words mean.”

Will grinned, letting himself fall back on the bed. “You don’t. So, what did you make for the pack?”

“Your recipe.”

Will looked at the phone again. “THAT is my chicken and wild rice treat recipe?”

“I added some beef jus, the veterinarian down the street told me that would be alright and sent me a recipe for a zucchini and carrot treat mixture I may try tomorrow.”

“You took them to the vet?”

“No, I ran into Marion on our walk. She was very impressed with our progress.”

“Was she?” Will frowned at the venom in his voice.

“Yes, the last time she came upon us I was on the ground.”

Will found the image rather soothing until he pictured Marion helping Hannibal up, the two of them sharing a laugh, exchanging numbers.

“You know you’re supposed to keep six feet away from people,” Will grumbled, scratching his stomach and glaring at a crack in the ceiling.

“Yes, well, take comfort in the fact that seven dogs are an excellent barrier to my person.”

“Are they any better on walks?”

“I think we’ve made remarkable progress.”

“I think we have too,” Will whispered.

“I’m sorry, Will, what was that?”

“Huh? Nothing.” Will could feel himself flushing, he was tempted to just hang up the damn phone.

“Ah, well, in light of all the progress we’ve made, Will, I was wondering if you would mind if I broadened your dogs’ command training?”

Will raised an eyebrow. “Depends on the commands.”

“What commands are you concerned about?”

“Kill, maim,” Will smiled into his shoulder. “…decant, sauté…accessorize.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Will. Buster’s an excellent accessorizer .”

Will laughed, throwing an arm over his face.

“Will? May I teach them a few more commands?”

“Yeah, yeah, alright.” Will rolled to his side, curling around the phone. “Just make sure I don’t have to learn Italian to speak to them.”

“German, then?”

Will laughed again, it was odd to feel light and happy, but still ache to be near someone. He thought of Jack, of the loud booming laugh he heard when he called Bella. He wondered if Hannibal was lying in bed, curled around his phone, the dogs sleeping in the study.

“You didn’t ask me what the commands would be, Will.”

“I didn’t.”

“One might take that as a sign of trust.”

“One might.” Will felt something dangerous and hot curl in his gut. He wanted to keep the conversation going. Over the phone, Hannibal wasn’t a killer, he was just the nice man taking care of his dogs. It was so safe, so easy. If they could just talk like this forever, maybe…maybe it would be enough. He wanted to ask Hannibal to stay on the line, he wanted to listen to Hannibal sleep, he wanted to wake up together, still connected even though they were so far apart. With a sigh, Will sat up. “Goodnight Hannibal.”

“Goodnight Will.”

Chapter End Notes

Next Up:
Jack and Will go to Target, Bella takes a bit of a turn, and Hannibal might be organizing a doggy choir...

Day 7

Chapter Summary

Jack and Will go to Target. Hannibal organizes a doggy choir.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jack grinned wide when Will walked into his room for breakfast. “You have to grovel, or did she send you the text?”

Will frowned, just for a moment he considered correcting Jack. But that would involve admitting he wasn’t sure if he or Hannibal was the lure anymore. “I got a text.”

Jack nodded. “Didn’t make you grovel? She’s a keeper, Will.”

“Yeah, maybe.” Will shook the box of cereal. “We’re running low.”

“I saw that. Ready to brave the stores to resupply?”

“Not like we have anything else to do.”

“Good. I haven’t gotten to bark at anyone in nearly a week.”

Will snorted, settling down to eat his cereal next to Jack. “Can’t have you get rusty.”

Will grabbed Jack’s shoulder just as he started to charge. Stumbling a few steps, Will dug his heels in to finally bring Jack to a stop. Looking around, Will saw that Jack had dragged him and their cart about three feet — the man was apparently as stubborn and strong as an ox. “Let it go.”

“She stole from us!” Jack had his interrogation face on now, and Will could just picture the melee that was about to happen.

“She was faster.”

“She stepped on my foot and grabbed the last EasyMac! She assaulted me!” Will tried very hard not to laugh at Jack’s stormy expression. It was true, the woman in question, who was probably all of 5-feet, had stomped on Jack’s toes and elbowed her way to the last three packages of EasyMac. Will found himself contemplating the woman’s rudeness, thinking of Hannibal. Had the doctor been with him, Will was sure that woman would be inlaid into his version of the Mosaic of Bacchic Dancers, using body parts and macaroni as the tiles.

“Jack, we’re supposed to play poker with Bella at 2. Please don’t make me explain to her that you were arrested because of macaroni.”

Jack deflated. He looked more petulant than murderous now, at least. The big man waved his hand at the tub of Slim Jims. “We can’t just eat that all week.”

“We have canned stew, Spaghetti-Os, hotdogs and ramen — we’ll live.” Will could see Jack’s jaw working and sighed. “I promise, you can close-line the next person who steps on your toes.”

Jack glared, but took a breath. “Fine, but we’re getting M&Ms.”

Will nodded, biting his lips to keep the smile off his face. Jack fell into a sullen silence by Will’s side as they rolled toward the candy aisle. The sound of a woman shouting stopped them at the foot of the Household Products aisle.

“Give that back! HEY!” They watched as a man shoved a woman, grabbing a pack of toilet paper and a bag of rice from her cart. A small red-faced toddler wailed, and the woman rushed to soothe him instead of chasing the man.

Will turned to Jack, sharing a smile with the older man. “OK, go for it.”

“And then Jack barked DROP IT at this guy and scared the shit out of him. He dropped the toilet paper and Jack handed it to the lady the guy snatched it from. He threw the sack of rice, but Jack chased him out of the store anyway. It was great. Made me think of the way Zeller scrambles whenever Jack yells.”

“Uncle Jack, ever the righter of wrongs,” Hannibal chuckled softly. “It seems you two had quite the adventure getting supplies. Did you do anything else today?”

Hannibal knew, of course. He and Will had started texting several times a day — mostly about the dogs, and the news…and sometimes things they thought would amuse the other. Jack watched Will on his phone with a knowing smile. It made Will nervous, but it also made him wonder if this was how it was supposed to be — if the most functional relationship he ever had was with Hannibal Lecter.

“We played Poker with Bella until her coughing got too bad. I think I owe her $40 when we get back.” Will frowned at the memory. Bella had been a bit dull when she skyped in, face not quite as animated, eyes tired. But she had still played poker with them, ribbing Jack the whole time and making him laugh and shake his fist at the camera. The coughing started sporadically but got so bad she had to set the cards down. Jack had talked her through the fit, asking her to breathe in a tone so soft it made Will feel like he was privy to something unbearably intimate.

After Bella got her breathing back, Jack had told her to rest up, that they’d talk after dinner. The rest of the day was quiet, Jack and Will silently watching HBO, neither willing to talk, neither willing to part company either. They talked about the prosecution of their latest killer over dinner and laughed that it seemed as though even psychos were taking the shelter

in place orders seriously — there hadn't been a new case since they got stuck outside Chicago. Hannibal must be bored too, hunting those who broke quarantine would be fun, but it's not like he could eat them.

"Is Bella coughing more frequently?"

"I think the new treatment isn't agreeing with her."

Hannibal hummed. "I could, perhaps, suggest-"

"I don't think that's a good idea."

"True." Will could hear the crackling of a fire. He could picture Hannibal reclining in a chair, a volume of Virgil in his hands. "We did not part company on the best of terms."

Will made a noise of acknowledgment. How grateful Jack had been when he found out that Hannibal had saved his wife. How funny that the one-time Hannibal chose to spare a life, it may have been crueler than allowing it to end. Jack didn't see it that way, though.

The silence stretched until Will realized the silence itself was an oddity. "I don't hear any noises…be honest, Hannibal, you killed all my dogs, didn't you?"

An amused huff filled Will's ear. "As poor as the meat selection has been since my organic butcher closed, I'm not quite desperate enough for that, no."

"But they're so quiet." They were never that quiet unless Will was there. He missed lying on the floor tinkering with engines, surrounded by his pack. Absently he wondered if Hannibal was lying by the fire with them. He smiled at the image.

"Do you require proof of life?"

Will laughed. "What?"

Hannibal whistled an odd multi trilling sound that lilted high and low. Will pursed his lips at the noise, he knew it. There was something so familiar… "Ladies and Gentlemen, your father would like to speak to you. Ready? Buster, start us off, please."

A small woof.

"Elinor."

Another yip.

"Zoe."

A higher yip that left Will grinning like a fool.

"Max, Jack, and Harley, together please."

Three deep barks.

“Winston? Winston, come.” An audible sigh made Will’s gut twist. His poor dog, still unsure in the face of Hannibal’s attempts at friendship. He wanted to come home, to bury his face in Winston’s fur, teach him to be in a room with Hannibal. “Winston, I know we’ve had our differences, but it’s for Will.”

“Hannibal? Put the phone out.”

“Alright.”

“Winston! Winston, speak buddy!”

A reluctant woof sounded over the line, followed by a snuffling noise. After a moment, Will could hear Hannibal wiping off the phone.

“It seems I still have work to do.”

“Still pretty impressive.” Will let his head loll back on the pillows. “Why have Jack, Harley, and Max bark at once?”

There was a long pause before Hannibal finally answered. “I was experimenting with the timbres of their barks.”

“Are…are you trying to organize a dog choir?”

“Not a choir per se, it’s more of a harmonic experiment, similar to a canine Theremin.”

“So, this is what happens when you get bored, huh?”

“I’m not bored, I was merely curious.”

“Sure.” Will’s smile grew so wide it hurt. “What was the tune you were whistling? I know it.”

“It’s Chopin.” Hannibal paused. “I needed a distinctive tune to capture their attention.”

“It’s a waltz, isn’t it?”

“Commonly, it’s known as his minute waltz, but before it gained that moniker Chopin had titled it Valse du Petit Chien.”

“The little dog waltz?”

“He was said to be inspired by watching his lover George Sands’ dog chase his tail about their garden terrace. The frenetic energy reminded me of Buster as he clamors about my halls.”

“When I get home, are you going to try to keep Buster?”

“He may attempt to keep me.”

Will laughed long and loud, wondering if Buster might have a point.

Chapter End Notes

Next Up:
Jack and Will have a zoom meeting. Hannibal sends Will a video. *shifty eyes*

Day 10

Chapter Summary

Will attends a zoom meeting. Hannibal goes gardening. Jack is trying a new look.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will rolled into Jack's room at 10, freshly showered. He'd checked his texts and felt a mild twist in his gut when he realized there was no message from Hannibal. He'd grown to expect a morning picture of one of the dogs.

But Will couldn't dwell on his disappointment for too long, he and Jack had just enough time to eat before the Zoom meeting with the rest of the department. Moving straight for the Sven bowl — for some reason, cereal just tasted better in that one than the little ice lizard bowl — Will stopped when he took in Jack. He tilted his head when he noticed the grey hair that had sprung from stubble to a beard seemingly overnight on Jack's jaw and neck. "You look like Santa Claus."

Jack frowned, grabbing his coffee mug. "Hey! Bella said the grey is sexy!"

Will shrugged as he poured some cereal into a bowl. "She has to think you're sexy. I just think you look like Santa Claus."

"You know, you're a shitty roommate, Will." Will shrugged, eating his cereal in peace as Jack grumbled to himself about silver foxes. When Will was done and the Frozen plates washed, both men put on their button-down shirts, but left their boxers on — there really wasn't anyone to impress from the waist down.

Jack logged them into the Zoom meeting, pulling some files to discuss. Hopefully, they could work out the reports they were submitting for the spree killer and wrap up a few more pre-trial cases so they would be ready when the courts opened back up.

"Hey Will!" Price's face popped up first. The man squinted at the screen. "Jack? You look like Santa Claus!"

Jack muted Will's laugh from the rest of the chat.

"Jimmy, that's good work on the print report."

Price squinted at the screen. "Are we sure he's not Santa? Because this might be a Christmas miracle."

Zeller laughed, then looked at Jack's stormy face and immediately turned off his camera.

Will snorted. "I think living with me finally broke him."

"CAN WE GET BACK TO THE REPORTS?"

"Jack! You're OK! I was so worried." Price pressed a relieved hand to his chest.

Jack's eyes narrowed, but he let it go. "I had three emails this morning about the Ripper. Do Will and I need to request-"

"Oh, no," Price laughed. "It wasn't the Ripper."

Will stared at the screen, his heart pounding. "You're sure."

"I just glanced at the autopsy, this guy was playing operation on his wife, yanked a few pieces out post mortem — didn't even use a blade, just grabbed them and pulled. No way this is the Ripper." Jimmy shrugged. "I can send you the report, but even Z could see it."

"HEY!" Came from the black screen in their meeting.

"So…we've got no reason to have the FBI pull us back?" Jack sounded drained.

"Nah, he tried to pose the scene as a Ripper kill, but there was evidence everywhere, even the locals were dubious."

Will nodded. He felt something strange and bitter bloom in his chest. How dare that man with his petty little domestic crime pretend to be the Ripper? Hannibal would be furious if he found out — he should be furious, to have his creations disrespected by-

"Will? You OK?" Will's head shot up. He hadn't realized he was clenching his fists.

"Yeah…yeah. I'm-"

"He always looks like that," Jack said, nudging him. "Now, Z, where's my fiber analysis?"

Hannibal had texted Will a video in the middle of the Zoom meeting. Will found himself staring at the file, wondering what Hannibal had found worthy of filming. Will's mind battered about his skull like a bird in a cage, the possibilities of what lay on his phone torturing him. It was probably a video of the dogs.

Probably.

But…what if it wasn't?

An image flashed in his head; a strong tanned hand wrapped around a thick cock. Hannibal would be uncut; the tip would be so wet as the foreskin moved back and forth-

“Will?”

He jumped, nearly fell off the chair. “Huh?”

Jack sighed, closing out of the Zoom meeting. “Just go check your phone.”

“What?”

Jack nodded at the phone clutched in Will’s hand. “You’ve been looking at the notification for 15 minutes.”

“N-no, I-”

Rolling his eyes, Jack made a shooing motion. “Tell her I say *hi*. I’m going to Skype with Bella.”

Will got up but paused. “How’s she doing?”

Jack shrugged. “Tired. Pretty nauseous.”

A weight twisted in Will's stomach. “I’m sorry, Jack.”

Jack waved him off. “Go. Let me talk to my wife.”

The video, as it turned out, was of the dogs. Will tried not to think about the momentary wave of disappointment that surged when he pressed play and saw Harley and Max next to a patch of dirt. Both dogs sat obediently, eyes trained to the person holding the camera.

“Harley? Max? Dig.”

Both dogs walked to a patch of freshly turned soil and began pawing at the earth. After a moment, Hannibal’s voice rang out again.

“Thank you.”

Both dogs immediately stopped digging, moving back to sit beside the garden.

“Jack? Come.” Jack emerged into the frame, dragging a small wagon filled with tomato plants and seedlings Will couldn’t identify. The phone was settled on a table, angled toward the garden and Hannibal joined the frame. He was wearing a white button-down shirt and grey slacks, an utterly ridiculous outfit for gardening. Will felt his smile grow wide as Hannibal stroked Jack’s white ear. “Thank you.”

Jack joined Harley and Max. Hannibal kneeled by the garden, selecting a tomato plant to place in it. A small white and brown flash went by the frame. Then around again. On its third trip by the garden, Hannibal snatched Buster mid-stride, pulling the dog to his hip. “I believe we’ve discussed your interruptions, Buster.”

The dog barked, squirming in Hannibal's grip. With a sigh, Hannibal set the dog on the ground. Buster immediately flopped on his back pawing at Hannibal's pants, muddy toenails snagging on the fine trouser material as he demanded belly rubs. "Buster! I've told you-"

The dog wiggled closer, more insistent. Hannibal sighed, planting the tomatoes one-handed as he scratched Buster's belly with his free hand. "Incorrigible little mongrel."

Will's heart soared. He sounded so impossibly fond. Will pictured being there. Laughing at Hannibal's obvious favoritism, waggling his eyebrows and asking for a belly rub of his own. Would Hannibal smile? Would he drag Will to bed? Or maybe they'd just kiss in the dirt while Buster yapped.

The video ended and Will called Hannibal.

He settled back on the bed as the phone rang. He found he liked to lie in bed when he talked to Hannibal, it made it easier when his knees felt like jelly.

"Hello, Will."

"Are you turning my dogs into a lawn care crew?"

Hannibal sniffed. "I was rather overconfident in my abilities. Looking back, it was a mistake to give Buster a hose."

Will started laughing. He could see it so clearly – Buster rushing around Hannibal's yard, spraying the doctor and the dogs as he whipped his head from side to side. Hannibal would have borne the brunt of the water, because Buster would have shaken the hose to taunt him and continue the game.

"Will? WILL. Are you quite done?"

"No," Will gasped. "No, I'm not."

He laughed until his stomach hurt, the Chesapeake Ripper, who the FBI still hadn't built a credible case against, was getting waterboarded by a 17-pound terrier.

Will gasped again. "Ok. Ok. I'm done. I…how are you?"

"Rather filthy at the moment." Will wanted to ask for a picture, but he bit his lip instead. "I had thought I would keep the dogs outside until the majority of the mud dried, but perhaps you have some advice on bathing them?"

"I do."

"What's that?"

"Pray." Will started laughing again, his heart skipping a beat when Hannibal laughed with him.

Chapter End Notes

Next Up:
Bella and Will both get a surprise. Jack gets a clue and Hannibal sends a selfie.

ALSO - YOU ALL GET AMAZING ART FROM ISH. SERIOUSLY. THIS PIC - BETTER THAN THE DAMN STORY.

Day 12

Chapter Summary

Hannibal starts a new business. Jack starts to suspect. Will is just thirsty on main, TBH.

Chapter Notes

FIRST, let's all take a moment to appreciate the GORGEOUS art by Ishxallxgood - absolutely wonderful and better than the fic, TBH.
Second, Hannibal takes his shirt off, y'all! I mean...happy Wednesday!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jack was still skyping with Bella when Will wandered in the room. Jack offered him a toothy grin. “There he is!”

“Huh?”

Jack held up his laptop, Bella sat in her robe, a silk bonnet on sipping from a mug. “The tea is wonderful, Will.”

Will smiled, trying not to look utterly lost. “Good.”

“It really has reduced my nausea. I haven’t tried the soups yet, but I can’t wait. How did you know what to send?”

Will was about to ask what the hell everyone was talking about when Bella moved her phone and Will saw an elegant arrangement of tea sachets and jars of what looked like homemade soup. He knew immediately where it came from, what he didn’t know was why his name was on the card.

“I,” Will considered coming clean, but in all likelihood, the teas and the soups would make Bella feel better. He itched to text Hannibal, make sure there were no people in the food, but Bella looked so much brighter today, smiling widely at the camera. “I just researched a few companies.”

“I’ve never even heard of Buster Winston’s Kitchen, is it a local place?” Will saw Jack squint at the name, he ran a nervous hand through his hair.

“Neighbor of mine used them when he got sick, I asked him if he could send you some next time he was out.”

“Since when do you talk to your neighbors?” Will could hear Jack’s cop voice; he knew an interrogation when it started. Will knew he couldn't afford to succumb to nerves. He squared his shoulders and lifted his chin.

“I just-”

“Jesus Jack, it’s the first time I’ve felt human in four days, I don’t care if it’s laced with LSD, I’m taking it.”

Will smiled. “I promise there’s no LSD in it.”

He still wasn’t sure about the people, but there was no way Hannibal would lace synthetic drugs in something meant to be served — organic hallucinogenic mushrooms, on the other hand...

“The soups look so fancy. You know I had to look up what a silkie chicken was.”

Will chuckled helplessly. “I’ve had that one, it’s good.”

“I just wanted to thank you in person. Really, Will, this is wonderful.” Jack was still staring at Will like he was holding a bloody knife, but Will focused on the beaming woman on the computer screen.

“I’m glad it helped. I, *uh*…I think I’ll eat in my room this morning, give you two some time to chat.”

Bella waved. “Thanks, Will.”

“Yeah,” Jack watched Will pour his cereal into a bowl. “Thanks, Will.”

Will did his best to get the hell out of Jack’s room without looking like he was fleeing. When he sat on his bed, door safely shut between them, he texted Hannibal.

BUSTER WINSTON’S KITCHEN? Are you out of your mind?

Did Bella enjoy the basket?

She did. She’s drinking the tea now.

Excellent.

Were there any people in what you sent Bella?

I believe I sent her soups and teas. Was there a stray hand in the arrangement?

Shut up.

Will pocketed his phone, laughing to himself. What an odd monster he’d managed to reel in.

Will spent the rest of the day being silently scrutinized by Jack Crawford. The man wasn't stupid, he probably had a suspicion about where a basket of fancy craft teas and soups could be procured during a quarantine at a moment's notice. But Jack also seemed to notice the change in his wife, and that, for the moment, had earned Will a pass from interrogation.

Still, all that quiet examination was exhausting. Will feigned a headache and went to bed. Once he heard Jack's booming laugh, he knew the older man was skyping Bella and he felt safe calling Hannibal.

"Buster Winston's Kitchen may I take your order?"

"You think you're so fucking cute, don't you?"

"I've rarely been called cute."

"Let me guess ravishing?"

"On occasion."

"Sexy?"

"From time to time."

Will snuggled into his covers. "And yet you're spending your quarantine with seven dogs."

"An oversight on my part." Will could feel Hannibal's amusement. It made the tips of his ears heat. "You were lucky enough to find yourself quarantined with Uncle Jack. Tell me, does he snore?"

Will turned the camera on and held his phone aloft. He angled the screen to show him, rumpled hair and tight t-shirt lost in the starched sheets of a big motel bed. He looked, well frankly, he looked like he was asking for it. And maybe he was, but he snapped the picture anyway and sent it to Hannibal. "No Jack. I promised you I was all alone."

Hannibal hummed and the noise seemed to reverberate through Will's core. He pressed his legs together, now was not the time. "That is a very large bed, plenty of room for company."

"Maybe there is," Will rasped.

"My bed, sadly, is rather crowded tonight."

Will swallowed something sour at the back of his throat. He thought of Alana, of the games he thought they had stopped playing. He was about to hang up when he heard the beep of a text notification.

Hannibal Lecter had sent him a selfie.

A shirtless selfie in bed.

Will had to shove his face into his pillow to muffle the noise that clawed out of his throat. He took three heartbeats to compose himself and looked at the image again. Hannibal lay on several pillows, hair slightly tousled and head cocked at an angle. His broad chest was blanketed in a thick pelt of salt and pepper chest hair. The arm not holding the camera was looped around…Buster, who lay sprawled on his back as well, head cocked at a strikingly similar angle to Hannibal's.

Art by [Ishxallxgood]

“Oh my god.” Will laughed. “Who are you and what have you done to Hannibal Lecter?”

“It’s temporary,” Will could picture the small smile coiling at the edge of Hannibal’s mouth. “I’m afraid Buster injured himself on our evening walk.”

“What? How?”

“I’m not sure. One moment he was with the pack, the next he was hopping on three legs. I carried him home and he continued to hobble about the house. I was planning to take him to the emergency vet in the morning if he doesn’t-”

“He’s lying.”

“What?”

“He wanted you to pick him up, and you did.” Will snickered. “He hasn’t tried that with me in ages.”

“I think I would know the difference between-”

“Hold your hand up like you have a treat to give him. I bet he’ll drop the act and bounce all around like a lunatic trying to get it.”

There was a faint rustling noise and then the sound of Buster’s excited yips. Will grinned like a fool when he heard Buster’s name followed by something terse in a foreign language.

“I take it he’s made a miraculous recovery?”

Hannibal tsked. “What a little prevaricator.”

Will rolled onto his back, pillowing an arm behind his head and resting the phone in the crook. His free hand stroked absently along his stomach. “You kick him off the bed?”

“No.” There were mattress creeks over the phone as Hannibal resettled. Will could picture Buster burrowing into Hannibal’s side, still snuffling looking for the phantom treat. The doctor sighed. “I admit I find myself charmed by convincing liars.”

Something about the tone of the words sat heavy in Will’s stomach. He stilled, fingers clutching over his stomach. He opened his mouth, not sure what he could say. He had been lying, by omission at least. He let Hannibal believe he’d killed Freddie Lounds. He’d reported to Jack on so many things. But the lies seemed to lessen as they continued to talk. Will wasn’t sure they were lies anymore. “He…*uh*…he isn’t lying about wanting to be in your bed, Hannibal.”

Will closed his eyes, voice going soft. “That…that was never the lie.”

There was a long silence, Hannibal’s steady breath in his ear helped to calm Will’s frenetic heartbeat. “I’m heartened to hear that, Will.”

Will smiled, taking a shuddering breath. “Buster probably has a lot of regrets about how this happened.”

“I’m surprised…*Buster* has any regrets at all.”

Will scrunched his brow, plucking at his t-shirt. “Of course he has regrets, don’t you?”

“Typically, I don’t dwell on disappointments.”

Will rolled his eyes at the most Hannibal response he’d ever heard. But his mind latched onto a word. “Typically implies that there are exceptions. Which indicates there are a few things that, atypically for you, you do regret.”

An amused huff answered Will. He heard Buster complain mildly and imagined Hannibal shifting in bed. Will’s free hand stretched out, stroking at the empty cool sheets beside him.

“Do you know what kintsugi is, Will?”

“It’s a Japanese pottery style, isn’t it?” Will’s fingers tangled in the sheets. He tried to imagine warm skin beneath his palms.

“Yes. Specifically, broken pottery which is pieced back together using gold.” Hannibal took a deep breath. Will closed his eyes let Hannibal fill the space next to him in his bed. “The result is a piece often more beautiful and unique than the original.”

“Our broken parts are honored as integral to the whole?”

“I’ve always rather liked the idea of reforming something to be more beautiful than originally intended.”

Will licked his lips. “You smash the teacups to bring out their beauty.”

“I endeavor to.” There was an odd pause, Hannibal’s breathing still steady in Will’s ear, but a hesitance between them. “Recently, I’ve found myself wondering if my designs have left me with more gold than teacup.”

Will’s breath caught. He could feel the fragility between them, Hannibal waiting to see what he would do with it. Will thought of Abigail, of Beverly Katz, of the mess they’d both made as they tried to reform each other to better suit their designs. “Perhaps…perhaps both of us have misunderstood the point of the kintsugi.”

“How so?”

“Kintsugi isn’t done intentionally. The point is to find beauty in the repairs, not force the breaks where you want them most.”

“Even if you plan the fractures, you can never quite predict the full impact of the break, can you?”

“No.” If Will concentrated, he could feel chest hair under his fingertips. He ran his hand along the empty bed in a soothing motion. “Perhaps the best idea is to smash both our cups and see what they form together.”

“Broken but conjoined?”

“Whole, together.”

Hannibal’s voice was rough when he finally spoke again. “What would they form, Will? These smashed teacups of ours.”

“I…I don’t know,” Will whispered. “Something beautiful.”

Chapter End Notes

HOW AMAZING WAS THAT ART, RIGHT? If you love it, Ishxallxgood has more gorgeous pics to look at!

Next Up:
Jack makes a concession. The Wendigo gets some action...

Day 15

Chapter Summary

Jack makes a concession. There's an unexpected guest during Hannibal's call with Will.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jack had been quiet for a few days. Normally, Will would have appreciated the peace, but Jack wasn't a man meant for silence. Will could feel Jack's eyes on him, as they resupplied at the store, as they drank beer and watched movies.

The conversations that had been bordering on friendly were now stilted, filled with unsaid accusations. They still put on a good show for Bella, who seemed a bit more vibrant as she sipped her teas and kicked both their asses at Boggle. Will found himself counting the seconds until his phone beeped with a picture of the dogs, or until he could slip away to call Hannibal. Will waited to hear the doctor's voice at the end of every day, Hannibal talking him into a restful sleep.

But today, Jack seemed gruffer than usual. They had both deflated when they heard the governor extend the shelter-in-place order for a full thirty days. He stared hard at Will, shook his head, and glowered at his hands. Jack had barely paid attention during their afternoon Boggle tournament and Will hadn't asked why Bella didn't join them. He knew the answer would only bring pain to Jack and a sick feeling of dread to himself.

Finally, over a bowl of instant mac n cheese, Jack broke. "Bella had another round yesterday."

"Oh." Will looked at Jack, there were thousands of little fissures forming around his hard exterior. "I'm…I'm sorry. Is she, *uh*…"

Jack set his jaw, took a deep breath. "She's sick again, and almost out of that tea you sent her. I…"

Jack closed his eyes. "She tried looking the place up online, couldn't find it. Could you — could you have some more sent to her? That and the soup's about the only thing she can keep down."

Will smiled sadly. He could feel the ache pouring off Jack. The need to make something, anything right for his wife. "Yeah, I'll make a call tonight."

"Thanks, Will," The words sounded bitter, but Jack clapped a hand on Will's shoulder just the same.

“I will see if I can make a larger basket for Bella,” Will could hear Hannibal scratching something on paper. “Do you know what teas she preferred?”

“I just know the teas helped and she can keep the soups down.”

“I’m not sure I can make the silkie broth again with the current state of the market, but I’m sure I can *TSST*-”

“What was that?”

“Zoe and Buster seem to keep themselves occupied by feuding over their beds. They’re clearly labeled, I don’t know why-”

“You labeled my dog beds?”

“Of course not! I had new ones made, the ones at your home were eyesores.” Hannibal sniffed; Will could hear him snapping his fingers. “Zoe, really, you know your cushion is there.”

“You — did you have dog beds made for seven dogs?”

“Will, non-essential businesses are closed, where would I have purchased seven bespoke dog cushions?” Will waited, ears perked. “I reassigned a few items in the house to the dogs.”

“You Scarlet O’Hara-ed dog beds, didn’t you?”

“I have no idea what that means.”

“You used the drapes to make a dress.”

“Why would I use my drapes? I simply made a few covers for pillows and cushions I wasn’t currently using.”

“What did you make them out of?”

“Spare linens, mostly.”

Will pictured his pack drooling on 1,000 thread count linens wrapped around pillows and cushions that surely cost more than their yearly vet bills. “Mostly?”

“I…used a shirt to wrap Buster’s cushion, as I was running low on fabric.”

Will beamed. “That’s why Zoe wants it. They’re fighting over you, your scent, not the bed.”

Will couldn’t blame Zoe; he’d probably try to snag Buster’s bed too.

“Really? How flattering.”

For one horrible second, Will thought he'd said that out loud. Then Hannibal murmured something to Zoe and Buster.

"Are you sick of them yet?" Will pulled his shirt over his head, lying in his bed in his cotton boxers. He'd been feeling so warm at night when he talked to Hannibal, maybe removing a layer would help.

"They're rather dull conversationalists, and I must admit they don't seem to care about food presentation at all," Will closed his eyes, picturing how the warmth in Hannibal's voice would light his dark eyes. "But I do find them rather charming. And now that we've worked out a training regimen, they're very little trouble."

"Think you've got the training thing worked out, do you?" Will stretched feeling his spine pop as he settled into the sheets.

"It's simple conditioning."

"Simple, huh?" Will smiled. "Funny, I heard about a man who got dragged down the street by seven dogs. And another guy, or maybe it was the same guy...? Anyway, this idiot let a terrier con him into-"

Hannibal sniffed. "I had a few setbacks, admittedly. But now I've discovered what the dogs want, and I give it to them when they behave according to my wishes."

"You make everything sound so clinical."

"It is clinical. The same principles can be applied to people."

Will began to absently stroke the skin above his boxers, he was feeling overheated even without the extra layer. "So…what? If I made you happy, you'd give me a belly rub?"

"If that's what you wanted." Will's breath caught at the low tone in Hannibal's voice.

His fingers began tracing the waistband of his boxers. "And if it wasn't?"

"I'd ascertain what treats you do like." Hannibal's voice curled in Will's ear. He could almost feel the doctor's breath against his hair. "Humans respond to a multitude of positive rewards."

"Oh?" Will's voice was breathy in his own ears. He cleared his throat.

"A beautiful meal, for instance, could be viewed as a reward for certain people." Hannibal hummed, the noise made Will tremble slightly, his legs parting as he settled into the mattress. "Some may simply wish for verbal praise. To be told how deeply and profoundly happy their actions have made me."

Will's eyes slipped closed. The idea of that praise, of genuinely surprising and pleasing Hannibal, left a glow deep in the pit of his stomach. "Some people want to be called a *good boy*?"

“Indeed.” Hannibal’s voice was lower again, it washed over Will in waves. “Something as simple as *You’re so good for me, darling boy* might be enough to activate pleasure centers in the brain for some.”

Will rolled, pressing his legs together as he held the phone closer to his ear. He was getting hard, and he wondered if somehow, Hannibal could scent it through the phone. “And if they want more?”

“There’s always physical intimacy,” Hannibal practically purred. “People respond beautifully to a hug, the stroking of hair, fellatio, all-”

“WHAT?” Will dropped the phone in his haste to sit up. He scrambled to bring Hannibal back to him.

“Like most things, Will, the response depends on the relationship you have with the subject,” That amused clinical voice was back. Will wanted to sink his teeth into it and shake it. “You wouldn’t simply grab a stray dog, would you? You’d take your time, build up a rapport, before you offered any sort of affection, wouldn’t you?”

“Y-yeah.” Will worked on deep soothing breaths and keeping his hands away from the growing problem in his boxers.

“Just as I wouldn’t deign to tell you that you’re a *good boy* before dropping to my knees and opening your fly,” Hannibal said primly. “It would be rude to assume you were interested in such a thing.”

“A-and-” The words caught in Will’s throat. He stretched his neck and licked his lips. “And if you were sure of my interest?”

“Then I suppose I’d know how to reward you... hypothetically.”

“Hypothetically speaking, what…*uh*…what would you do?” Will closed his eyes again. He pictured a roaring fire and a monster in a dark suit silhouetted before it, antlers dancing in the flames.

“Purely as conjecture?” The beast asked in Hannibal’s voice.

“Purely.”

The creature leaned its head back, great antlers dipping into the flames of the fireplace and emerging glowing like embers. It hummed, a guttural noise that went straight to Will’s cock. “I suppose, first, I’d tell you that I find you utterly wonderful.”

Will frowned. He took a seat by the fire across from the beast. “You think I’d respond to flattery?”

“No.” The creature’s smile was full of sharp, crooked teeth. “I think you’d abhor it at first, but I’d like to condition you to accept compliments because I believe you should understand your own value.”

Will spread his legs in the leather chair, watching as the antlered creature grinned at him. “So, you’d start off my reward with something I hate?”

The beast tipped its antlers back into the fire, black skin sizzling as the grand mantle was heated. “Many people enjoy a bit of pain with their pleasure, Will. I would hope you could endure a few fleeting compliments.”

Will’s fingers gripped the armrests, keeping him anchored to the chair. The room felt so warm. “W-*uh*-what would they be?”

The monster’s gaunt face looked up, tilting in that particular Hannibal way, like a cat toying with a mouse. “Brace yourself. I believe I’d tell you first how wonderful you are, how your mind and spirit have utterly bewitched me, my darling boy.”

Will panted in the chair, fingers digging into the supple leather so he didn’t reach out. The long-limbed beast fell to the floor, prowling closer to Will as it scented the air. It smiled wide, too many teeth in that beautiful mouth. “Will? Did you hang up in disgust?”

“I…that wasn’t so bad.” Will looked around Hannibal’s office. The walls were red, bleeding. It was so unbearably hot, sweat slid down Will’s back, making him shiver.

“Brave as ever.” The monster hummed. Its taloned hands were tracing patterns on the canvas of Will’s pants. Will wanted to press forward, to let them rip.

“S-so after the compliments, what would my reward be?”

The talons sank into his flesh, just a bit, pulling Will forward in the seat. “Am I still operating under the assumption that I have your enthusiastic consent for physical touch?”

“Yeah,” It was barely a whisper, but it was enough.

“Then I think I would drop to my knees before you.” The beast kneeled between Will’s spread legs.

“W-why that?”

“Because it’s an act of worship. An act that is, in its foundations, about offering pleasure to those receiving it.” The creature’s flesh grew paler, its eyes bloomed to maroon instead of black. Will could just about see the high cheekbones filling in with warm tanned flesh. The antlers remained.

“You wouldn’t get pleasure out of it?”

“Bringing someone pleasure is always a reciprocal act, is it not? Knowing that you’ve pleased someone, that you are the source of their joy…that triggers our animalistic drives to provide for others, does it not?”

Will reached out, tracing Hannibal’s horns at the base, the flesh seared his fingertips. “So, there are no selfless acts.”

Hannibal smiled. He still had the monster's mouth. "Trust Will Graham to turn oral sex into a debate about Nietzsche's theories of altruism."

"If this weren't hypothetical, then I'd probably be too distracted to do much of anything."

"More's the pity," Hannibal growled. Will found himself drawn closer to this half monster, half Hannibal creation before him. "But it is hypothetical, isn't it, Will?"

"Yeah, just…conjecture…Wha-*uh*-what else would you do?"

Hannibal looked up, his eyes blood red and gleaming before Will, antlers shifting as he chuckled silently. "Are you asking for techniques?"

"I, *uh*..." Will felt the fire blaze, he was so unbearably warm. He wondered if he'd melt through Hannibal's talons.

"I would go slowly with you, I think." Will lunged forward, wrapping his hands around Hannibal's antlers, feeling his flesh sizzle and pop at the contact. He pressed into the sensation, willing the searing to fuse them together as the beast at his feet nuzzled his thighs. "There's time for passion and rending garments later, but I think I'd like to savor this, allow you to savor it too, until you knew nothing but my tongue and teeth against you. Until I became what anchors and unmoors you all at once."

Will's body was on fire. He needed. He needed so desperately. "Hannibal, I-"

"It's late, Will, you should get your rest."

Will blinked. He wasn't in Hannibal's office. He was in a motel room outside of Chicago — alone and hard, panting into a phone. He reeled at the change, suddenly shivering as his sweat cooled in the empty room. Will wanted the fire back, the exquisite pain of Hannibal searing his flesh at every touch. "Talk to you tomorrow?"

"Of course, Will, the dogs would never forgive me if I didn't." Will smiled, Hannibal sounded a bit breathless too.

"Goodnight, Hannibal."

"Goodnight, darling boy." Will gasped as the phone went dead in his hands. He fell back onto the sheets, twisting in the starched linens as Hannibal's words lay heavy on his chest.

Chapter End Notes

Next Up:
Jack spends his anniversary with Will. Will gets a deeper look into the Crawfords'

marriage. Hannibal and Will take their nightly chatting from phone to video...

Day 20

Chapter Summary

Will gets another look at Jack and Bella's marriage. He also begins to wonder if he can build something like that for himself.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will got up early to grab his and Jack's laundry from the motel's industrial washer. Jack has eased up on his scrutiny since the new batch of teas and soups arrived at Bella's doorstep and Will enjoyed the companionable silence he and Jack had fostered in the days since.

He dropped his sack of clothes on his bed and knocked before swinging open the door. "Got your laundry."

Jack was sitting on his bed, two empty beer bottles prone beside him. He gestured with an open beer to the rest of their stock, sitting on the nightstand. "Want a beer?"

Will sat Jack's clothes on the foot of the bed, raising an eyebrow. "At 8 in the morning on a Thursday?"

Jack shrugged, limbs already a little loose. "It's Wednesday."

Will squinted. "Wednesday?"

He was losing time again. It reminded him of his stay in the BSHCI — time lost all meaning. Days, nights, hours, minutes — it all blurred into a state that was merely existence. He would eat what they gave him, sleep for want of anything better to do, and spend all his waking hours thinking about Hannibal Lecter.

Quarantine, it seemed, was no different. Though his fantasies about Hannibal had shifted from blood and pain to blood and sex. Though, if he was being honest, the longing that threaded through all his fantasies had been there from the beginning.

Will shook his head, eager to rid himself of this much honesty so early in the morning. "Breakfast beer? What's the occasion? Did Price turn in that print report?"

"It's my anniversary." Jack took another long pull from his beer, nearly empty now. He toasted Will with the remnants.

Will's mouth crumpled, the tease dying on his lips as he studied Jack. "You talked to Bella yet?"

Jack shook his head.

Will frowned. "You should."

"I know." Jack reached, fingers clumsily groping for another beer. "Just need another one of these, first."

Will grabbed a beer for himself, passing one to Jack. They twisted off the tops in tandem, clinking bottles in a wordless salute. Will settled by Jack's feet on the bed. "You think she'll be angry?"

Jack shook his head. "It won't be the first anniversary she's spent alone."

But it might be the last. Will swallowed, taking a long gulp of his beer as his mind reeled. He tried to turn it off, to tamp down the words, but he had no paddle to steer him away from the realization.

The chemo is taking so much out of her. I always thought we'd have years to spend together after we retired. I've got plans for when she's wrinkled and grey, dancing around our house to music we listened to on our first dates. But now I know that we won't ever have that. That this might be our last year, and I'm spending it in Illinois. But I can't let her see that. I'll drink until I've drowned out reality, and all she can see is my love.

Will's eyes prickled, he coughed, wiping at them before chugging the rest of his bottle. "What goes good with breakfast beer? Frosted Flakes or Slim Jims?"

Jack laughed, not the booming sound reserved for Bella, but it was a start. "Dealer's choice."

Will held out two Slim Jims, Jack nodding in approval. They ate their breakfast of beef jerky and beer while watching Magnum P.I. reruns. Will was reminded of mornings with his father when the old man was too hungover to do much. He wondered if Hannibal ever got too hungover to be fancy. Could Will coax him into getting wine drunk and sloppy? He liked the idea of a loose-limbed Hannibal having to be put to bed and cared for. He liked the idea of bringing him toast and water in the morning, as the doctor squinted at the sunlight, hair rumpled.

A knock at the door made them both jump and sent Jack sprawling off the bed. They both laughed until they realized no one had answered the door yet. Jack padded to the door, opening it to find the motel manager, a bandana over his face, clutching a bucket with champagne and several boxes of chocolates.

"These arrived yesterday, Mr. Crawford, but the instructions said I wasn't to give them to you until today."

“Oh, uh…thanks.” Jack grabbed a few spare dollars on the dresser and handed them to the manager, who left the items at the door and scurried away.

Will hovered over Jack’s shoulder. There was champagne — the good stuff Will never bothered with — chocolates, and an assortment of flowers.

“Guess she couldn’t find roses.” Will watched as Jack ran a finger along a blue bloom.

“Bluebells, black haw viburnum, and garlic mustard,” Jack’s voice was so soft as he cradled the bouquet in his arms. “Our first anniversary, I worked late, didn’t even occur to me that the florist would be closed at 9 pm. I couldn’t go to her empty-handed, so I pulled over on the side of 95 and grabbed any plant that had a flower on it. I wrapped them in a newspaper. When I got home, I’d cut the hell out of my hand pulling at a shrub and I was covered in mud. Bella laughed so hard she almost fell over. Ever since then-”

“You pull off 95 and get her wildflowers.”

“Every year but this year.” Jack’s eyes were wet, he swallowed hard.

Will turned, pretending to study the champagne bottle while Jack pulled himself together and put the flowers in the ice bucket since no vase was available. Will stared at the French label, eyes unseeing. He felt sorry for Jack, of course, but jealousy also slithered through him.

He wanted a story like that. He wanted it with Hannibal. Will wanted a flower, or a tie, or a little knickknack — something that would look unextraordinary until you knew the story. A talisman that was shorthand for their devotion. Will wondered if taking in the dogs was enough to build that language between them, something founded on inside jokes and thousands of little moments that spoke of a lifetime.

It was a start.

“Here,” Jack bumped a box into Will’s chest. “This box is for you; she says it’s a thank you for keeping me sane this month.”

Will took the box. Truffles, from a store he’d never heard of. “What about all the other months?”

Jack laughed, still shaky, but getting better. “Get the hell out of my room, Will, let me call my wife.”

Will smiled. “Tell her thanks.”

“I make better truffles than Rhebs,” Hannibal snitted.

Will sat, propped on a pyramid of pillows, enjoying another chocolate treat. “Yeah, well, I don’t have your truffles, I only have these truffles, and they’re amazing.”

“I could send you-”

“If I get a delivery from Buster Winston’s Kitchen here, I’ll kill you.”

“With your hands?”

Will huffed. “Just let me enjoy the damn truffles, Hannibal.”

“Would you like some company as you enjoy them?”

Will squinted. “Isn’t that what I have?”

“I was thinking of something a bit more substantial than a voice.”

For one heart-stopping second, Will wondered if Hannibal was outside the door. What would he do if presented with Hannibal Lecter after nearly a month of whispered conversations in the dark? “What…did you have in mind?”

“Do you have your computer nearby?”

Will had installed Zoom on his computer so he could chat with the rest of the team on their weekly Tuesday conference call. He was so used to seeing bland motel and kitchen backgrounds — except for Price who projected what Will thought might have been the living room from the Golden Girls as his background.

When Hannibal blinked onto his screen, camera angled oddly so that Will was looking up his nose, the empath huffed a laugh. “That’s a choice.”

Hannibal’s sharp eyes cut down to glare into Will’s screen. “Please give me one moment Elinor was attempting to eat the camera I need to find an alternate place to set my tablet.”

“You know her name is Ellie, right?”

“I know that’s what you call her, yes.”

Will grinned as he walked with Hannibal to a table in the study, getting an eyeful of red sweater and chest hair as the doctor leaned over the tablet, adjusting the angle. He let his fingers curl at his side, to keep from reaching for the screen.

When Hannibal was satisfied with the angle, he was gone, and Will watched with some amusement as the light levels in the room began to fluctuate. Ellie, Jack, and Harley all milled by the settee mid-frame, snuffling at the floor and wagging their tails. Max was asleep coiled in a leather high-backed chair just to the right of frame, his paws leading him on a chase of god knew what while he was sleeping. When Hannibal had dimmed the lights to the perfect creamy yellow, he appeared again, in black slacks with a red sweater, settling on an ornate settee and crossing his legs neatly. His hair wasn’t slicked back, his clothes were almost casual — he looked softer, warmer.

Buster ran into frame, immediately jumping up and pawing at Hannibal’s knee. To Will’s utter amazement, Hannibal bent, picking up the Jack Russel and tucking him into his

hip.

“Can you hear me, Will?”

“Yeah,” Will could feel the smile stretching his cheeks wide. He hoped he didn’t look too ridiculous.

“You seem in high spirits.” Hannibal was absently fondling one of Buster’s ears, looking like some sort of regal bond villain. The other dogs began settling at his feet.

“Guess I’m getting used to confinement.”

Hannibal’s hand stilled for a moment, his chin ticking down. “I suppose you would be familiar with the feeling.”

“I am.”

“And yet you’re talking to me.”

“Well, you did kidnap my dogs.” Hannibal smiled then, a full human smile that bared his teeth. Will considered how long it would take him to walk to Baltimore.

“I had to do something. I was told the light from friendship won't reach us for a million years.”

“So, this is you speeding up the process?”

“Converting it to dog years, at least.”

Will smiled. “Still a pretty long time to wait.”

“And yet I find myself willing to try.”

Will shook his head. They looked at each other for a long time, distance stretching and compressing all at once. Eventually, Will licked his lips. “I only see five, where are Zoe and Winston?”

Hannibal sat up, trilling a little whistle. The tiny tapping of little paws rang out as Zoe scrambled into the room. Hannibal bent to stroke her ears, ignoring Buster when he yipped at the action. “Zoe has found she likes to nap in the sunlight in the kitchen. I imagine she was there when this began.”

Will scanned the edges of the frame, looking for Winston. “Winston’s still giving you trouble?”

Hannibal’s mouth thinned. “He’s really no trouble, he’s just…withdrawn.”

Will whistled. “Winston! Winston, here boy!”

Will heard a thundering clatter and Winston skidded into the study. He stopped short of Hannibal, looking around the room.

“Here, boy!”

Winston whirled to the camera, tail wagging. He ran toward it and soon Winston’s nose was the only thing Will could see, as the tablet was snuffled. “Good boy! Good boy! You have to be a good boy for Hannibal, OK? If you’re a good boy, I’ll take you fishing when I get home.”

“Honestly, Will, I don’t need you to bribe the dogs.”

“Well, you don’t need me to bribe Buster,” Will admitted, grinning as Hannibal tried to keep Winston from knocking the tablet off the table.

Chapter End Notes

Next Up:
Jack, Will and Bella play boggle. Will and Hannibal try a "thought experiment" that...might just be phone sex?

Day 27

Chapter Summary

Will plays boggle. Then has an extremely interesting phone call.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will smiled at Bella's face on the screen of Jack's laptop. She was drawn, shivering, and wrapped in a blanket. "Hey, did you get the new soups and teas?"

Bella smiled. Hannibal had assured Will the third delivery would get to Bella by Monday, but now he wasn't so sure. She pulled her blanket more securely around her shoulder. "I did, and they're still great, just…some days are better than others."

"You'd never be able to tell," Jack winked at the camera as he brought the Boggle and two beers to the table.

"Really? You think I always look like this?"

"I think you're always beautiful."

Bella rolled her eyes, but her smile was a little bigger. "You're just angling for a special call tonight."

Jack drew back, hand to his chest. "You think I'm just givin' it up because you call me? You used to send me flowers and chocolate! I want to be romanced woman!"

Bella made a face, which triggered Jack's booming laugh. Bella cracked up too but had to pause to cough. Jack's laugh died, and Will watched as the man intently stared at his wife. The focus, the fury — Will was surprised the screen didn't open up for Jack to crawl in.

Once Bella got her breathing in order, she smiled. It was weaker, not as bright, but it was there. "Alright, boys, ready to lose? Shake up the letters, Will!"

"And then Bella had Jack laughing so hard he about fell off his chair." Will grinned at the memory, but the expression faltered. "But then she got so tired and sick, we had to call the game early."

"Did she receive the new teas?"

"Yeah, just…sometimes nothing helps, I guess."

Hannibal hummed softly, the noise filled Will's ears and made him feel a bit less alone. “It’s common for late-stage cancer patients to have days were even palliative measures aren’t-”

“I don’t want to talk about it.” Will pulled his shirt off and tossed it with the pile of dirty clothes in the corner. He’d have to brave the industrial laundry room again soon.

“You admire her very much, don’t you?”

“I guess I do.”

“But it’s more than that, isn’t it Will? You admire them together, their marriage.”

“Haven’t been around many good marriages,” Will admitted, slipping into his sheets.

“Does their marriage give you hope, Will?” There was a curious tone in Hannibal’s voice. “Does it make you want a marriage?”

“No…maybe.” Will rolled, coiling on his side with Hannibal tucked between his pillow and his ear. “I- It’s more the way they speak. The knowing. I covet that type of connection.”

“We covet what we can’t have, Will. Do you fear you can’t have a connection?”

Will cleared his throat, his heart hammering. “I fear I have one already.”

Hannibal hummed. “And what about this connection do you fear?”

“I fear-” Will reached out along his big empty bed, trying to imagine skin beneath his fingers. “That I don’t fear it.”

“That is quite the conundrum,” Hannibal agreed in his best clinician voice. “What would happen, I wonder, if you set your fear aside? As a mental exercise.”

“I-”

“Would you snare yourself on this connection, Will? Or would you finally find yourself able to breathe freely?”

Will took a deep breath. He felt like he was tilting over the precipice of something enormous. “Hannibal, I-”

“Are you in bed, Will?”

A shiver ran through Will’s body, he burrowed a little deeper under the covers. “Yes.”

“May I guide you through an exercise?”

Will trailed his fingers down his chest, nails scraping lightly on heated skin. “OK.”

“Close your eyes.” Will plunged himself into the dark. He thought of his home in Wolf Trap, his spartan bed in front of a blazing fire. “Picture your connection, this frightening

person beside you."

Hannibal lay in the bed facing Will, both curled on their sides as they watched each other. There was no trace of the monster Will had seen during his last fantasy, though Hannibal's shadow did look horned as it flickered on the wall. "I see them."

"Are you afraid of...them?" Hannibal asked, reaching a hand out to Will.

"No." Will murmured into the pillow. He moved closer, trying to close the gap between him and Hannibal.

"Are you safe?"

Will watched Hannibal, so out of place in Will's Wolf Trap living room, yet so very at home in Will's bed. "Yes."

"If you're safe, then I believe we should examine the root of your fear, Will. Would this person you see bare you open both physically and mentally? Keep you from hiding and worship the pale bits of yourself you never allow in the sun?" Will shifted onto his stomach, his cock swelling as he rolled his hips experimentally. He forced himself to be still, to picture his bed in Wolf Trap with Hannibal beside him. "What would it feel like, I wonder, to allow yourself exposure? To allow another to worship that which you find so very frightening."

It would be beautiful, absolutely wonderful. Will shuddered. "H-Hannibal."

"You're panting, Will. Are you afraid?"

"No."

"Do you feel them with you now, Will? Do you feel their eyes on you? Can you imagine their touch?"

Shoving his forehead into the pillow, Will arched his back, still pressing Hannibal to his ear with his free hand. He pictured the doctor rubbing along his back as Will lazily thrust, whispering to him. "Yes."

"Would it be brutal? Is that why you're whimpering, Will?" Hannibal's voice had gone rough and deep. Will's gut clenched at the thought of the doctor running long fingers down his own torso, pressing at his own cock.

"N-no…" Will could see it so clearly. He could practically taste the tears on Hannibal's skin, feel the strong fingers tracing down his back, digging into his vulnerable places. He keened lightly. "I-*uh*-it would be t-tender. S-so soft and full of reverence. They'd weep as they pulled me to pieces."

"And what would you do, Will? Would you say *stop? If you loved me, you'd stop?*" Hannibal's breath was heavy in Will's ear. The ragged sound drove Will harder and deeper as he rolled his hips.

“No. N-not in a million years,” Will moaned, a broken little sound that clawed from his throat. He was so maddeningly close. “I’d beg for more. Beg for his t-teeth.”

Hannibal made a wounded sound. It was enough to drive Will over the edge. He came in his boxers, driving his dick into a motel mattress, dreaming of a warm fire playing on flannel sheets and sharp cheekbones. “H-Hannibal, I-”

But the words stopped, his throat working as he trembled. He listened to Hannibal’s broken breath in Baltimore, wishing he could kiss each gasp as it left the doctor’s throat.

After a few moments of panting, Hannibal seemed to steady. “Do you want to talk about our exercise?”

Yes. Desperately.

“N-no.”

Hannibal hummed, and the sound shook through Will’s bones. He was cold and sticky, he wanted to take the phone into the shower and have Hannibal with him as the water sluiced over his body. “Very well, get some rest, Will.”

“Goodnight Hannibal,” Will whispered, another declaration perched in the back of his throat.

Chapter End Notes

Next Up:
Jack and Will go on a walk. A major breakthrough is made between Hanners and Will.

Day 30

Chapter Summary

Jack and Will take a walk. Buster Graham is the MVP.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"You know, there's a group of old women in my neighborhood who do this every morning," Jack huffed as he and Will strolled around the block. "We're just missing colorful windbreakers and visors."

"I'll put them on the list, we can pick them up next time we go for supplies."

Jack snorted, then sped up. They had begun taking morning walks when both men realized they hadn't been outside in days. The cityscape and urban sprawl weren't as peaceful as Will's fields and river, but it was nice to feel the sun on his face. Jack, as it turned out, was competitive even in walking. Will wondered if he could goad the older man into jogging sometime soon.

"You know, they're thinking of ordering us to wear masks."

Will frowned. "Where are we gonna get those?"

"I think I might have two in my emergency bag — in case we encounter biohazards."

"Great, we'll look like surgeons, out for a jog."

Jack laughed.

They walked another few blocks before turning and heading back to the motel. Jack was still quiet these days, but Will didn't feel like a bug under glass every time Jack looked his way. It was something.

"Bella got her scan results back." Jack was looking up the street, shoulders tense. Will's gut soured at the body language.

"Oh?"

"We, *uh*…we may need to look at a more aggressive treatment."

"Ah." Will looked down at his feet. "I'm sorry."

“Well, she wants to just-” Jack cut himself off before he started to yell. He took a breath. “If I could just hold her, tell her that if it gives us time it’s worth a try.”

Will remembered his father at the end. He lived for months, but there wasn’t much to his days but pain and incoherence, maybe it would have been better, if- “What if…what if she still doesn’t want to try? Even with you pushing.”

Jack wiped at his eyes, Will watched the traffic on the other side of the street. “Then I guess I’d just hold her, thank her for the time we have left.”

Will felt his eyes pricking. He slapped Jack’s shoulder. “Come on, let’s walk for a few more blocks, it’s not like there’s anything else to do.”

Jack nodded. They breezed past their motel, Jack asking about the dogs as they took in the sun.

Will checked his messages again, his thumb hovering over his last text from Hannibal.

Would you mind skyping tonight?

Will licked his lips. They had talked several times since…the incident. It was all light and fun — mostly about the dogs and Hannibal considering what outfits would best suit each dog (Apparently Buster was a tweed man and Zoe would look lovely in checks). Will had told Hannibal he didn’t want to talk about it and Hannibal had taken him at his word.

Still, why would Hannibal want to skype unless…

An image of Hannibal sprawled shirtless in his bed flooded Will’s mind. He could picture the light as those beautiful cheekbones moved, head arching in pleasure. As with everything Hannibal did, there’d be grace to masturbation. Will couldn’t see him hunched over in the shower furtively jerking at his cock. No, those large, strong hands would be languid, pulling gracefully as his fingertips traced veins and pressed just under the head of his uncut cock. It would be beautiful, base pleasure turned into performance and transcendence all at once — a sight to be cherished. And oh, how Will would treasure it, guard it from the world and keep it to himself as if he alone should ever be granted the privilege of bearing witness to Hannibal’s pleasure.

His doctor would be beautiful, a mix of elegant lines and masculine strength, and while his belly was soft, Will had seen the muscles beneath in the picture Hannibal had sent of himself and Buster. Will looked at that picture more times a day than was strictly necessary, but he told himself that was because he missed Buster.

Will’s fingers shook. Was he ready for this? Was he ready to openly acknowledge this…thing that was happening?

He looked at the skype screen on his laptop. It was seven-thirty, he was supposed to call.

With a sigh, Will did what he always seemed to do when he was faced with a choice concerning Hannibal — he leaped.

Pulling his shirt over his head so he was in nothing but boxers, Will hit the call button. Little fissures of electric pleasure ran along his arms and settled into his stomach, his body ringing along with the call.

The camera picked up…a fully dressed Hannibal, beaming broadly. The tablet was again set up and angled toward the floor, where Hannibal sat cross-legged on a carpet that was probably woven by Atilla the Hun's godmother. The doctor waved at the camera, but he seemed distracted, looking off to the right.

"Will! I'm so glad you could skype tonight. I've been working on this for three weeks now and I believe we're ready." Hannibal was still staring off-screen and Will was starting to get the vaguely disappointing notion that this wasn't a sex thing.

"Oh?" Will crossed an arm self-consciously over his chest. Why had he thrown his damn shirt across the room?

"Yes. Now watch — Winston? Come." Hannibal held out a hand, eyes fixed. Will's breath had stopped. He heard a few soft clicks and then a tawny muzzle appeared on screen. He didn't run up for pats and scratches as he did with Will, but Winston had come when Hannibal called him, keeping about six inches away from the doctor when he arrived. "Good boy. Now, Winston, shall we be friends?"

Hannibal opened his palm, offering it to Winston. The dog hesitated, then slowly sat and put his paw in Hannibal's hand. Hannibal grinned wide, thumb stroking the top of Winston's paw. "Good boy, Winston. Thank you."

Will's heart was pounding in his chest. When Hannibal turned to the screen, crooked teeth bared his smile was so wide, Will thought he might just cry. "You- I can't believe- Good boy!"

Hannibal's head tilted; his eyes narrowed. It seemed he'd finally taken in Will's shirtlessness on the screen. "Who's a good boy, Will? Me or Winst-"

A small white and brown blur barreled into Hannibal's chest. He fell over, but righted himself, clutching Buster in his hands. He sat the little terrier down next to Winston, shaking a finger in the dog's face.

"Buster Graham! Everyone else could wait in the kitchen while Winston and I-" Hannibal gestured to Winston, but Buster jumped up, knocking Hannibal's hand away from the other dog. He crawled into Hannibal's lap, stubby tail wiggling as stood on his hind legs, resting his paws on Hannibal's chest. "Now if you think I'm going to reward your shenanigans wit-"

Buster lifted a paw and smacked Hannibal square on the mouth. When Hannibal glared, clearly outraged, Buster lifted his paw and smacked him again, this time shoving the paw against Hannibal's lips as if to shut him up. Hannibal gripped Buster's paw, Buster

pulled back before butting into Hannibal's chest again. This time, Hannibal went down laughing. He wrestled on the carpet with Buster, both of them snarling playfully as they rolled. Winston watched from the corner of the frame; ears pricked in confusion.

Finally, Hannibal grabbed Buster and held him aloft.

"Enough you little hooligan! I'm trying to talk to-" Hannibal paused, smiling at the camera. His hair was a mess, bangs in his face and pieces in the back sticking up at odd angles. His mouth was loose and curved, far from the prim little line it usually formed. His shirt was wrinkled, pulled from his pants in one spot after his romp with Buster. The doctor cradled Buster to his chest with one arm so he could push the hair out of his face. "Will? Are you alright?"

"I-" Will looked at the panting man, who ducked his head down to rub his chin between Buster's ears. "I'm sorry. I have to go."

Will slammed the laptop shut, staring blankly at the far wall.

Holy shit, he was in love with Hannibal Lecter.

Chapter End Notes

Next Up:

Will has a talk with Jack. Jack has a talk with the FBI.

Day 38

Chapter Summary

Jack and Will have a talk. Jack and the FBI have a talk. Will and Hannibal have a talk. This week is all about communication!

Chapter Notes

I'm going to level with you all. This is not the week for me. I should have responded to comments, but I'm trash and haven't. I can just say I'm dealing with some stuff so y'all will have to cut me a break. Sorry!

Hopefully, I'll have some downtime in the next few days to respond to everyone, because your comments mean the world to me and I thrive off of them. Thank you all for understanding!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

For seven days, Will had white-knuckled his way through evening chats with Hannibal. The doctor clearly sensed that something was off, but chose to distract from Will's tense behavior with laughing stories about the dogs' antics, sending funny pictures of the dogs (none with Hannibal in them, Will noted sourly), and plans for new tricks. Apparently, the good doctor was convinced he could get Elinor and Max to help him dust.

Will would sit on his bed, listening to the voice that now haunted him, and try desperately not to blurt out something stupid.

He tried distracting himself by talking to Bella and Jack every day. They'd moved on to playing poker in the afternoons and Will found himself watching the couple interact more frequently than he glanced at his cards. They were so familiar, so sure of each other.

Was that even possible with Hannibal?

Will found himself looking through the Ripper case files before he talked to Hannibal. He would cycle through crime scene photos, but he found it harder and harder not to see the poetry behind the gore. Could a psychopath have a romantic streak? Ironically the best person to ask about it was probably Hannibal.

But each evening, as he chatted with Hannibal, he felt…something growing between them. He knew Buster was Hannibal's favorite dog. He knew that Hannibal was worried that

Zoe had a neurological deficit that would explain the funny way she ran and why she sometimes bumped into doors, walls, and the other dogs. He knew that Max and Harley would not keep off the sofas and Hannibal had considered getting the bigger dogs booties so their nails wouldn't snag the fine silk and linen cushions.

Of course, it could all be an act. Hannibal Lecter was the most brilliant man Will had ever met. He could easily adopt a romantic artifice to manipulate Will. He'd done it with Alana.

And yet.

Hannibal seemed genuinely happy to hear from Will every time he called. He had worked tirelessly to exonerate Will and showed regret — not for his crimes, but for the fact that it lost him Will's company. Perhaps Hannibal himself didn't know he was human until it was too late.

And Hannibal wasn't the only person in their friendship guilty of prevarication. Hadn't this whole stupid plan with Jack revolved around Will's ability to lie to Hannibal's face and charm him into admitting something.

Will had started out shimmering with fury, lying and tempting Hannibal, practically salivating as he lured the doctor into his trap. But something had changed. He wasn't salivating for the kill anymore; he was salivating for the company. A night with Hannibal Lecter, walking through each other's minds and picking through dark things no one else would understand — it was bliss, pure and simple.

The empath could only hope he'd changed Hannibal as much as Hannibal had changed him.

"Will?" Jack frowned when Will jumped. Dry cereal showered around Will's feet. When had he come into Jack's room for breakfast?

"Hmmm?"

"Tell me what it is or go hover in your room. You're driving me crazy."

"I…" Maybe he could keep this vague. Maybe if Jack thought it was Alana… "I think I'm in love."

"Sit." Jack ran his hands over his face. Will sat across from him and watched as his boss went through about nine different emotions. Eventually, Jack rose up, walked to the dresser, and grabbed a beer. "Does this mean you don't think he's a killer anymore?"

Will looked up, wide-eyed. "What?"

"Hannibal. You think he's innocent and are willing to testify to that fact before a jury or an FBI inquest?"

"Hannibal? What makes you-"

Jack sat back in the chair, hunching over his unopened beer. “Buster Winston’s Kitchen? Damn Will, how dumb do you think I am?”

“I- *uh*…” Well, fuck. He looked at the table in a blind panic, as if the Olaf bowl would give him an answer.

Jack rolled his eyes. “After the delivery, I called Alana. She told me you were ignoring her texts and she was worried she upset you when she had Hannibal take the dogs.”

Will’s mouth fell open, just a bit. “This whole time, you-”

“First, I thought you were just making sure he was still on the hook. But I can hear you at night, Will — motels aren’t known for their thick walls.” Will felt his face flame, Jack rubbed his hands over his face like he was trying to scrub the thought from his brain. “I told you already, I finally had time to observe.”

Will nodded, his ears ringing. Jack opened his beer, taking a long pull. “And what I’d like to observe now is whether or not you think Hannibal Lecter is the Chesapeake Ripper.”

“I-”

“Because we’ve had Freddie Lounds in protective custody for over a month, Will.” The older man rested his head in his hands.

“I know-”

“And the body I let you set on fire? Was that…was that a mistake?”

“At the time-”

Jack dropped his hands and leaned forward. “You look me in the eyes right now and you tell me all you went through, all the pain and the desperate attempts to convince me, you tell me you don’t believe it anymore.”

Will’s eyes traced Jack’s face. He had a full beard now; his eyes were exhausted. Will saw the strain talking about treatment options with Bella had put on him.

“I love him.” God, it was so fucking simple to say. Why hadn’t he said it before?

“That’s not the question I asked you, Will.”

Will didn’t want to lie, didn’t think Jack would buy it if he did. So, he went with the truth. “I’m willing to testify that I was wrong.”

Jack closed his eyes and slumped back in his chair. He rolled his neck, the bones popping as he sighed. “You know, ‘bout the only thing that helps Bella these days is kush and those goddamn teas.”

Will watched Jack carefully. Jack was usually such an open emotional book, but now Will could only see pain and fatigue. “Do me a favor, Will? Get the fuck out. I need a

minute."

Don't risk it, kill him.

Will blinked at the voice in his mind. The way the advice didn't seem like a bad idea. He listened to it again, expecting to hear a heavy accent lilting the words. But he didn't, the voice running plausible murder scenarios in his mind was his own.

Shaking his head, Will stood and walked into his room, closing the door. He stared at his phone. He desperately wanted to text Hannibal, ask what he should do.

How are the dogs doing?

Thirty seconds later, a picture popped onto his phone. Buster was covered in white powder, Ellie and Jack were licking him.

Did you know naughty terriers can pull confectioner's sugar off high kitchen counters if they have enough ingenuity?

Will smiled. When had he started wanting things, wanting this life so badly?

They texted back and forth for the better part of an hour, nothing of substance, but just knowing Hannibal was there, that he had the man's attention helped ease Will's tension.

He had just started smiling again when Jack rapped heavy knuckles on the door. "Will? Come back in."

Will pocketed his phone and stopped by his nightstand to pocket the flip knife he carried with him to most crime scenes.

Jack was at the table, expression dour. His laptop was up and for once, Will didn't see Bella's smiling face on the screen.

"Sit," It was funny taking orders from a man in boxers and a t-shirt, but Jack's tone was too serious for Will to dismiss. "I've written up a statement. I need you to review it before I send it to Kade Prurnell."

Will squinted, moving closer to see the screen. "Jack Crawford misappropriated investigation time, lab resources, and broke protocol when he pushed Special Agent Will Graham into an unauthorized investigation…Jesus, Jack, what is this?"

"You'll never work in the field again, but you'll keep your job at the Academy, I think. They'll still want you to consult, at any rate."

Will felt lightheaded. "You can't — they'll fire you."

"Forced retirement, probably at a lower paygrade." Jack corrected. "If they fire me, that opens up appeals on all the cases I closed. Better if they get rid of me quietly."

"But-"

“I always got results, Will. It’s why I got to where I was and it’s why I never moved any higher.” Jack sighed. “But I’ve been wondering lately if everything I did, if everything I pushed for was worth my results. I pushed Miriam into a hell I’m not sure she’ll ever get out of. Then I turned around and pushed you into that same hell. I thought it was worth it. I thought in the long run — I was saving people. So, I kept pushing. And I pushed you right back at Hannibal. I greenlit this insane fucking plan, let you desecrate bodies and…”

Jack trailed off; he twisted his wedding ring with his thumb. “Maybe Prurnell was right. Maybe I should have taken the bereavement leave. I’ve gone so far trying to catch the Chesapeake Ripper, letting you try to catch Hannibal…and if I do, another killer will just pop up in his place. It doesn’t end, Will. There’s always another one.”

He studied Will, eyes sad. “At this point, I might be making it worse. I don’t want to add to the body count anymore.”

“You’ve spent your whole life-”

“I should have done this years ago,” Jack murmured. “If I had known about Bella... if I had actually believed that we didn’t have any time left… I should have quit the day I found out.”

“You don’t have to do this. There are other ways to-”

“I’ve lost a month, Will. And I don’t think she has many of those left.” Jack gestured to the write up on his laptop. “Just sign off on the goddamn thing and I can hopefully get the hell home to my wife.”

“I-” The words caught in Will’s throat. What should he say? Thank you seemed too banal. “Yeah, this is fine to send.”

Jack clicked the PDF and they both watched as it shot over to Prurnell’s desk at Quantico. “I *uh*, I think I should kick you out again. I should call Bella.”

“Yeah, OK.” Will took a shaking breath.

“Will? Those teas and soups, I need to know she’ll still-”

“They’ll arrive every Tuesday,” Will promised.

Jack nodded.

Will rose, lifting a hand to clap on Jack’s shoulder, but he thought better of the gesture. He tucked his hands into his pocket, feeling the comforting smooth edge of the flip knife.

He had reached the door when Jack called out again. “Will?”

“Yeah, Jack?”

“She’ll die eventually. And I’ll have nothing to do but look at the papers and sit with the decision I’ve made. Sit with the memory of Beverly Katz and visit with Miriam Lass.”

Jack clenched his jaw for a moment. “If there’s another killing and I think that Hannibal had anything to do with-”

“There won’t be,” Will assured him, walking out of the room. He understood now. Jack wasn’t giving them a pardon; he was giving them a head start. At least he had a timeline to work with.

Will pulled out his phone and texted Hannibal.

Skype tonight?

They had things to discuss.

Will couldn’t stop the grin when Hannibal popped onto his laptop screen. He sat on a damask settee, Buster in his lap, with Zoe and Ellie flanking his sides. On the floor at his feet, Jack, Harley, Max, and Winston sat, eyes fixed on the screen. It looked like a holiday card — Season’s Greetings from the Lecters!

How Will ached to be a part of that image. He’d sit to Hannibal’s right, head resting on the doctor’s shoulder as he corralled Ellie in his arms. Such a stupid, banal tradition, something Hannibal would no doubt turn his nose up at. But Will wondered if the doctor would do it for him.

A family portrait.

“Good evening, Will.”

“I see you’ve got the whole family there.” Will’s eyes crinkled in amusement.

“Not the whole family, no.”

Will faltered a little. The idea that Hannibal’s feelings matched his own was more frightening than the idea the doctor was feigning them. If this wasn’t manipulation, if this was really and truly a love with sharp teeth and fangs, Will would have to be careful. They couldn’t get lost in one another. If they did that, they’d be caught, no matter what Jack said about looking the other way.

Hannibal tilted his head, clearly studying Will’s face on the tablet. Buster and Ellie tilted their heads too. “I *uh* I think I can come home soon, well, in a couple of weeks. Jack’ll probably be needed back at Quantico…”

Because Prurnell will hold an inquest the second she can.

“Are you excited to return home, Will?” Hannibal rubbed Buster’s ear absently, his other hand stroked Ellie’s fur. “Get your old life back?”

Will thought about his old life. Lonely, tasteless meals at a sparse table. Long walks with dogs and no conversation. It used to be so appealing, walling himself up from the world. But now, he found himself chipping away at the mortar, trying to make a hole big enough for

a slim creature with antlers. “I don’t want my old life back. I…I think I need to make some changes.”

Hannibal’s eyes had a funny way of sharpening while barely moving. He could feel the doctor’s attention on him. “What do you want, Will?”

“Something better.” Days loafing on Hannibal’s settee, walking the dogs through muddy fields, and listening to Hannibal fondly complain when Max brought a drooled-on stick. Nights screaming Hannibal’s name until the pack howled in sympathy. Nights listening to others scream while Hannibal offered them no sympathy at all.

“What does *something better* mean to you?” Hannibal pulled Zoe in to ruffle her fur.

“I-” Will frowned. He couldn’t. Not like this. He wanted to tell Hannibal in person. That he forgave the doctor, though there was nothing to forgive. They’d both spent so much time cutting at each other, Will wanted to bind the wounds in person. He shook his head, chuckling to swing the conversation back to something lighter. “I don’t know, maybe I’ll get another dog. Maybe start dating, who knows?”

Hannibal smiled, but something blank slipped over his eyes. “How nice.”

“Hannibal?”

But Will’s monster was gone. In its place was the bland doctor the world saw every day. “I’m terribly sorry, Will. I forgot it was bath night. If I don’t keep their grooming up, you’ll think I’m a terrible dog sitter.”

“Hannibal, wait, I wanted to-”

“Tomorrow, Will. It’s not as if we’re going anywhere.” Hannibal sat Buster aside and stood. “Say goodnight to your father, everyone.”

“Goodni-” The screen went blank before Will could finish the phrase.

Chapter End Notes

Next Up:

Jack Crawford, relationship guru to the rescue. Also...Hannibal starts a small fire.

Day 49

Chapter Summary

It's been a long eleven days, y'all...

Chapter Notes

Thank you so so much to all the readers who were so sweet about me being late with comments! Really, I love you all so much!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Eleven days. Eleven fucking days of perfectly polite texts, dog pictures, and phone calls that ended in under 15 minutes. Will wanted to peel the paper from the walls. He'd asked to skype and been told that Jack had knocked the tablet off the table, rendering it useless. He'd suggesting skyping on his phone, but Hannibal had told him he couldn't figure out how to download the app.

The man who had planted a person tree stuffed with metaphoric flowers in the middle of a public parking lot couldn't figure out the fucking Google Play store, apparently. Will tried not to scream. He did his best not to beg, though he'd come dangerously close a few times when he'd made Hannibal laugh only to be immediately told the doctor had to go.

He couldn't go on like this. He needed to go to Hannibal, grab him and bang his head against a wall until he got the intrusive infuriating monster back. This polite shell was giving him hives.

Idly, Will wondered how long it would take him to walk to Baltimore.

"Trouble in paradise?" Jack looked at him over his readers, his face unbearably smug.

"What?" Will glared.

"You're pouting at your cereal, boy." Jack reached his spoon out and tapped Will's, just to watch the soggy frosted flakes fall to the bowl. "Change your mind about exonerating him?"

"No."

"Because if you do, I can't help you officially now. But I can still-"

“I DIDN’T CHANGE MY MIND.” The faces of Beverly and Abigail floated before him; he was ashamed of easily he dismissed them.

They ate in silence, Jack slurping his coffee. Will morosely chewing soggy mouthfuls of cereal. After 10 minutes, Jack sighed. “What happened? Did he forget to take the dogs for a walk?”

Rolling his eyes, Will huffed. “He’s being polite.”

Jack squinted. “And that’s bad.”

“He’s polite with you, Jack. I-” Will made a helpless gesture. “Now he’s treating me just like everyone else.”

“What’s the last thing you said to him before this change?”

Will shrugged. He felt like a sullen teen getting advice from his dad. But the only advice he remembered Daniel Graham ever handing out was *Sam Adams is for pussies and women son, men drink Coors Lite.* He twisted his mouth as he looked at Jack. “That I wanted a change.”

“A change?”

“You know get a new dog, start dating…”

“Start dating who?” Jack tilted his head. “Start dating him?”

“No! I didn’t…I couldn’t just say that over Skype!”

“You told the man you love, who’s spent the better part of two months taking care of your dogs and delivering tea to my sick wife to win points with you, that you were going to start dating?” Jack hooted a laugh, big and booming.

“Dating Hannibal was implied!”

“You sure about that, slick?”

“I…what was I supposed to do?”

“Better than that.”

“I didn’t-”

“Damn Will, I just threw my career away and you still might not get laid.”

“I got nervous!”

Jack smiled. “Bella was the most beautiful woman I’d ever seen in my life. I knew the moment I saw her she was my shot. So, I did what always got me laid before. I played it cool. I played it so cool she didn’t realize I was interested. Took me damn near three days to get

her attention again. She told me she wasn't going to waste her time with some man who wanted to play games."

Will could feel himself grinning. "So, how'd you fix it?"

"I waited outside her hotel every morning with a cappuccino and cornetti from this little place down the street. Every day I hold them out. Every day she breezes right on by me. Once, she flipped her scarf over her shoulder, hit me in the face."

Will raised his eyebrows. "What changed her mind?"

"On the fourth day, I yelled *Phyllis if you don't think I'm just as stubborn as you, you're out of your mind. Imma be here every damn morning with your breakfast until you let me take you out.*" Jack ran a hand over his eyes. "That went well. She turned on her heel stormed up to me, finger in my face. Told me that she didn't have time for pushy, rude men. Told me I was wasting my time."

Will pursed his lips. "…and."

"And I told her that some people are worth your time. And that trying to win the attention of a beautiful, smart, captivating woman like her wouldn't be a waste if I sat on her doorstep 'til doomsday with a coffee in my hand." Jack grinned. "She looked at me hard for a moment, but then she laughed — told me to come back to her place at 8 for dinner. The next morning, I got up, got her cappuccino and cornetti, and brought it to her in bed."

"I'm in quarantine with you, and the only place still open is goddamn Target," Will groused. "What am I supposed to do, wave a Pop-Tart at him until he caves?"

"Tell the man you're interested." Jack scoffed. "You know, for someone with a brilliant imagination, you have the social skills of a goddamn mushroom."

"Hi Hannibal, I love you. Please date me!" Will tugged at his hair with a frustrated sigh. "I'm gonna look so goddamn dumb."

"Will, the man kept seeing you even after you sent that guy from the looney bin to kill him — he's interested. Just…tell him you're interested too."

"And if I don't?"

"Then you'll die alone with your dogs." He took a sip of coffee. "My money's on that little one eating your body first."

"Fuck you, Jack."

"Good evening, Will. I'm sorry I don't have much time, I have a mille-feuille in the oven and the dough is quite-"

"Can we just talk a minute?"

“As I said, the dough is rather finicky, and I need to-”

Will scrunched his eyes closed and leaped. “I want to date you.”

There was a long pause. Will checked his phone, they were still connected.

“Hannibal?”

“I’m sorry, Will. I don’t think I caught that.”

Will swallowed hard. “I want to date you.”

“This is terribly embarrassing our connection must be poor, one more time, please?” Will could hear the mirth in his tone.

“You’re an asshole.” Hannibal huffed in his ear. “And I want to date you.”

There was another silence, Will’s palms started to sweat. “Hannibal?”

“Sorry, yes, I was wondering what you meant by *date*. Dinner and the opera? Perhaps a museum opening? Bathing the dogs together and collapsing on the sofa?”

“Yes. Yes to all those.” Will squeezed his eyes shut, grinning so fiercely his face ached. “I, *uh*, I’d want to go slow, though. I’ve never *uh*…”

“Dated a man before?”

“Dated someone I accused of serial murder.”

Hannibal laughed, bright and loud. “I suppose I’ve never dated anyone who’s tried to kill me…by proxy.”

Will’s eyes opened. Who the hell else had tried to kill Hannibal? Tobias? Something with teeth gnashed in his mind. He didn’t like the idea of competition. “Is it OK? To go slow?”

“Will, we’re currently housebound several states apart. Short of cutting off our phone calls and only communicating with letters, I’m fairly confident that we have achieved a slow start to whatever this may become.”

“What do you think it’ll become?”

“I’m never sure with you,” Will could hear the rough turn in Hannibal’s voice. It made him ache. “I’m only sure that I can’t wait to discover it.”

“Me too.” Will flopped onto the bed. He ran his fingers through his hair, pretending they were Hannibal’s. “So…what would you write to me?”

“Am I being restricted to an epistolary romance?”

“Not restricted, no, challenged.”

“I suppose I would write to you about the dogs and their exploits, perhaps my adventures in sewing.”

“You sew?”

“My tailor is evidently not deemed essential by anyone other than myself, so I confess I’ve been attempting a few sartorial designs of my own.”

Will stretched, letting the tension work out of his lower back. “What are you making, Hannibal?”

“I made a cloth mask for myself, and a few other items.”

“Other items? Like what a new tie?”

“Yes, something like that.”

“What else would you write me about?”

“I suppose I would include a few sketches of the dogs. Elinor and Harley are excellent models.”

“Because all they do is sleep.”

“Indeed.” Hannibal breathed deep. “What, would you write to me, Will?”

“Probably instructions for making dog food, suggested walking schedules,” Will smiled at the derisive snort in his ear. “Couple of stick-figure sketches of Jack in his boxers.”

“I can see this would be a very slow courting process indeed.”

“What would you send me to move it along?”

“I’m sorry?”

“You’re supposed to be romancing me, what would you send me to…pique my interest?”

There was a low hum on the phone. Will shivered. “Are you in need of piquing, Will?”

Will ran a hand down his chest, dipping over the shallow soft valley of his stomach. He palmed his cock, feeling it thicken as he ran his fingers along it. “I’m about half-piqued.”

“Well, let’s see if we can capture your full attention, shall we?” Hannibal breathed deep and slow. Will mirrored the breaths. “Would you like to know how I envision you?”

“Yeah.”

“I see a man with sharp teeth and a keener mind. A cunning thing, that looks slight but is a powerful foe. I see brown curls dripping blood on a cherubic face, rivulets running past curled lips and bared teeth.”

“This,” Will gasped. “This isn’t really the dirty talk I was thinking of.”

“Is it working?”

“Yessss,” Will hissed, fumbling to free his hard cock from his jeans.

“I picture myself at your feet, lapping the blood you will give me, eating from your hands what you choose to offer.”

“Anything, you can have anything,” Will whispered. He licked his palm before bringing it down to his cock, moaning softly at the smooth slide.

“I want your mind, Will. I want every cruel impulse you’ve ever had. I would watch you tear the world to pieces so that I might build you a new one.”

“Oh, I…I…” Will rolled his hips, fucking his fist as he tried to conjure words. “I want my teeth in your skin. I want to make you sob for me, only to deny you for days. I’ll make you beg, Hannibal. And thank me for the privilege. Then I’ll take you. I’ll claw into you so fucking deep, darlin’. You’ll never feel whole unless I’m inside-”

A loud siren followed by frantic barking filled Will’s ear. He yanked the cacophony back, staring at the phone wide-eyed. “Hannibal?”

“Yes! All under control!” There was a crash and fumbling that sounded suspiciously like a zipper.

“What’s happening?”

“I *uh* I believe — *yes Zoe I’m well aware of the problem*. Max! Get away from that!” There were several bangs and the sound of running water. The siren kept blaring. Will dropped his cock, sitting up and trying to control his breathing. After a few more clangs and Hannibal muttering to the dogs, the noise cut off. The dogs kept woofing, just in case. “Yes. Yes. Everyone, there’s no need for this! The crisis has been averted.”

“Hannibal! What’s going on?”

There was a long hesitation. “I seem to have forgotten that the mille-feuille was in the oven.”

Will snorted. Then started giggling. “Hannibal. Did you burn something?”

“It was a small fire, easily contained.”

“I’m sorry, Hannibal. I don’t think I caught that.”

“It was a small fire, easily-” Hannibal cut the sentence short. Will could practically feel his annoyed glare through the phone.

“This is terribly embarrassing our connection must be poor, one more time, please?” Will couldn’t keep the smile from his voice.

“Will, I’m going to put Buster in the oven if you continue this.”

“We both know you wouldn’t put Buster in the oven.”

“Jack, then.”

“Good luck fitting him in there.” Another huff. Will wanted to roll around in Hannibal’s fond annoyance like a dog. “When’s the last time you burned something?”

“Food?”

Will thought of the flaming body supposed to represent Freddie Lounds. “Yeah. And flambés don’t count. When’s the last time you well and truly fucked up something in the kitchen?”

“Never.”

“Hmmm, must have been quite distracted, Dr. Lecter.”

“Suitors shouldn’t make fun of their intended.”

“Shouldn’t they? They’re missing out, it’s so much fun.”

“Will, I have to go, to clean my kitchen and cuddle with Elinor who seems to urinate as a fear response.”

Will winced. “Oh, no.”

“Oh yes.” Hannibal sniffed. “But I shall call you tomorrow, for a longer talk.”

Will let his eyes fall shut. “It’s a date.”

Chapter End Notes

Next Up:

Will and Jack head home!

Day 59

Chapter Summary

Will and Jack go home.

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry, I've let the comments get away from me again. I do promise I'll have time tomorrow and will be responding to you all then. Thank you so so much for continuing to sustain me with your lovely comments - I adore them all!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After ten days of calls, Will had just about decided that he liked Morning Hannibal best of all. And it was a fucking commitment for Will to get that little treat every morning. He had to call early, earlier than Will was used to rising, but if he timed it right, just before 5 in the morning, he could catch Hannibal before the doctor woke.

“Good morning, Will.” Hannibal’s voice, rough with disuse and still shaking off sleep, filled Will with unexplainable glee. It was warm and thick-tongued, his accent smoothing over consonants and elongating vowels. Will wanted to live in it.

“Hi.”

“Up early again?” A yawn clipped the last bit of the question. Will pictured Hannibal sleep rumpled, hair in disarray, lines from the pillowcase smushed into his cheek, terrible breath he’d try to hide. Will desperately wanted to ask for a picture.

“Did I wake you?” Will yawned himself. He wished Hannibal slept in, but he learned the hard way that calling at 7, or even 6:30 would get him a lively awake cannibal. Jack had told him relationships were work. Now that Will was past the blood and gore, and Hannibal didn’t mind the dogs, the next thing they needed to work out was a schedule.

“I woke from a dream to the reality, hardly a loss.” Will smiled. Hannibal was especially gooey before he put his person suit on to start his morning. Will rather liked that too. He wondered if his presence in the bed could coax Hannibal to sleep in a bit.

“That’s a terrible line, Dr. Lecter.”

“Forgive me, I’ll text you a better one once I’ve had coffee.” He would, too. That was the best part. Will couldn’t wait.

“How was your night?”

“Buster and Zoe got into a battle over the bed again.” Will frowned, listening closely. He thought he heard a faint jingle, then the sound of sniffling.

“You brought Buster to bed with you again, didn’t you?”

“I was merely trying to protect Zoe from further harassment.” Hannibal sounded pleased with himself. Will pictured him stretching like a contented cat as Buster snuffled the bed.

“You’re spoiling him,” Will admonished. “He’s going to be a terror by the time I get home.”

“I like terrors.”

Will chuckled. “I guess you do.”

From somewhere in the distance, Will could hear a woof. He wasn’t certain, but considering the time, it was probably Max.

“I think I must get up and prepare for the morning constitutional…Shall I call you once I’ve settled them for the afternoon?”

“Don’t you have calls with your patients?”

“Not before one.”

Will grinned. “Call me at noon, then.”

Jack was on the phone when Will barreled into the room. “Did you get them back?”

The FBI had held two weeks of internal meetings before deciding that Jack Crawford needed to come back to Quantico and retire before the state opened back up. Two masked FBI lab techs showed up at the motel with testing kits a few days ago. Will and Jack had both submitted to a nasal swab that felt as though the tech was scraping their brain away. But it was worth it if it could get them home.

Jack held up a finger. “Yes. Yes. What time will the car be here? And it’s been cleaned?... Yes, thank you… I understand director. Yes, I’ll be at the meeting Monday. No… I won’t contest any of it… I’ll see you Monday, then. Goodbye.”

Will waited, face grim. Jack hung up the phone and rubbed a hand over his face. “Our tests are back, we’re both negative.”

“Great. They’re sending a car for us?”

“Apparently when you’re being forcibly retired in a secret meeting, you become an essential worker again.”

“Shit.”

Jack shrugged. “I’m keeping my pension. They want me gone and want my convictions to hold. It’s not a bad deal, really. Might take Bella to Italy for a few months.”

For her last months. Will swallowed hard. He could see Jack’s design. Holding Bella as the golden sunlight bathed the coast of Naples. He’d take her back to where he met her, find an apartment near the naval base, and take her for long walks. When she got too weak, he’d bring her to their balcony, somewhere beautiful that overlooked the Tyrrhenian Sea. On the day that they could find no more joy in simple company and beautiful vistas, Jack would wake her up with a kiss, bring her a cappuccino and cornetti before kissing her one last time and injecting her with enough morphine to stop her pained wheezes.

Will looked down, swiping at his eyes. “Yeah, she loves to talk about you two knocking around Italy.”

“It’s where we began.” Will flinched at the crack in Jack’s voice. It’s where they would end, too. And then Jack Crawford would be alone and ready to look back on past leniency.

They both let the conversation die, neither knowing how to move it forward. After a few moments, Jack cleared his throat. “They’re sending us a sanitized company car; Chicago office is sparing it for us.”

“Think we can drive through?”

“It’s only 10 hours. I’m not anxious to be in another motel.”

“Me neither.” Will patted Jack on the back. “I’ll take the first shift, pack all the Clorox wipes we have for when we stop for gas. Do we have enough snack food to get us through?”

“We’ve got a 12 pack of warm coke, a tub of beef jerky, and Peanut M&Ms.”

Will laughed, thinking of the time he and his father lived off a case of cold spam when the power went out. “I’ve made do with worse.”

“Oooooh, I wanna dance with somebody! I wanna feel the heeeeeat!” Will had to give it to Jack, it wasn’t the worst Whitney Houston impression he’d ever heard. The big man was bopping along, a Slim Jim clutched in one hand and beating out the rhythm with the other.

It had been around seven hours, and Will had hopes that they’d be home before he was desperate enough to drink another warm coke. He’d already eaten six Slim Jims for dinner and had a feeling his stomach wouldn’t thank him in the morning. The good news was the roads were eerily empty as they drove into the night. Hopefully, they were making good time.

His phone trilled in the middle of Jack’s solo.

Will? Is everything alright?

Will glanced down at the phone. He wanted to call Hannibal, but he wasn't quite prepared for Jack to hear their conversations. Maybe it was better to wait. Go home, get his thoughts in order, then maybe surprise Hannibal in a day or so.

Can't talk right now, I'm with Jack. Call you tomorrow?

Have a good night, Will.

You too.

Will stared at the screen. He itched to hit call.

"Don't even think about it."

"What?"

"Look I might not be able to hear what you're saying when you call doctor fancy pants, but I can sure as shit hear your bed springs. None of that while I'm driving, please."

"Jesus." Will felt his face heat. He focused on the road ahead.

"Just saying."

"How long 'til Virginia?"

"Few more hours."

"Want me to take over?"

"Get some rest, Will." Jack smiled. "We'll be there before you know it.

Will looked back at his phone, there was a picture of the dogs all sitting beautifully in front of their dinners — not even Buster sneaking a bite before Hannibal allowed them to eat. He'd be home soon, back with his pack.

And finally, with his monster.

Chapter End Notes

Next Up:
I know this week's chapter was short, but rest assured next week will be a long chapter because I had to fit in all the ~~smut~~ plot development.

Day 60

Chapter Summary

Will arrives at Hannibal's - and almost incites a dog orgy. So...normal day, then.

Chapter Notes

I am once again behind on comments. I'm sorry, but I'll respond to the rest tomorrow! Thanks to everyone for their lovely support! I so appreciate it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will woke to a sharp jab in the ribs. He glared at Jack, who gave him an unimpressed look and gestured out the window.

“Come on, get out, I’ve got to get going if I’m going to beat the traffic on 495.”

“Four-ninety-” Will looked at the house in front of him. He most definitely wasn’t in Wolf Trap. “Jack, wait. NO. I can’t-”

“Will, I haven’t seen my wife in two months, I’m about to lose my job, and I’m tired of looking at you. Get out of the goddamn car before I realize what a horrible fucking idea it is to not say anything about this.”

“I have beef jerky breath!” Nervous sweat beaded on the back of Will’s neck. “I haven’t showered since yesterday! He’s not expecting me.”

Jack reached in the back seat, grabbed Will’s bag, and chucked it onto the curb. “Will, get out of the fucking car.”

Will did, blinking as Jack peeled out of the driveway and raced down the street.

Well, fuck.

He checked his watch. It was 7 am, so Hannibal would be up. He stood on the sidewalk, bag in hand, wondering if he should call a cab. “Fuck it.”

If Hannibal didn’t love him with jerky breath and uncombed hair, well he would find out now. Slinging his duffle over his arm, Will stomped up the driveway and went straight to Hannibal’s door. He knocked.

And knocked.

And knocked again.

Will pressed an ear to the door. He couldn't even hear the dogs. For one wild moment of panic, Will wondered if Hannibal had stolen the dogs and taken off for parts unknown. Well, he probably wouldn't steal all the dogs — Buster, possibly.

With a huff, Will let himself slump onto Hannibal's stoop. Fucking Jack, now he'd have to call a cab. While he waited, Will dug through his bag to find his travel toothpaste. At least he could smell like mint while he waited.

He was scrubbing his molar with a Crest-coated index finger when he heard someone call out.

"Good morning, Dr. Lecter! I see the pack is in good spirits today!"

Will's head whipped up.

"Yes, Dr. Raffat, we had an excellent excursion this morning. Buster and Jack were able to frighten no less than seven squirrels!"

Will scrambled to his feet, hastily spitting the toothpaste into Hannibal's shrub and wiping his sodden finger on his pants — leaving a conspicuous white stain on his upper thigh. He closed his eyes. Hannibal hadn't seen him. The dogs hadn't scented him. Maybe he could just run away?

Will saw Hannibal's head over the fence first. His hair was unstyled, falling boyishly across his forehead. He wore a solid lilac face mask tailored to show off his cheekbones while protecting his face and nose. Will thought about the hard plastic of the BSHCI mask and how it cut into his face. This one was a much better fit for a cannibal. The mask matched a lilac tie that was knotted neatly at Hannibal's throat, the bold color picking up small purple flowers in his green dress shirt. Dr. Lecter even did pandemics in style, it seemed.

When Hannibal finally cleared the fence, Will caught sight of the pack and made an ungodly noise. The dogs were walking in height order, each keeping pace with the other. They were also wearing outfits that matched Hannibal's — Zoe and Ellie in ruffled floral jackets made from the same material as Hannibal's shirt, while the boys were in lilac waistcoats.

Winston looked up first and immediately broke formation to tug in Will's direction. The rest of the dogs followed suit, barking, and struggling on the lead. Will couldn't help the grin.

"Winston! Harl- All of you! Stop this insta-" Hannibal looked up at Will, his eyes widening just slightly. He pulled his mask down and pocketed it, his mouth curling into a full wide smile. After a few heartbeats, Hannibal released the dogs' leashes. "Go get him."

Will laughed dropping immediately to his knees to welcome the furry onslaught. Winston barreled into his chest first, knocking Will back as the dog frantically licked his face. Jack, Max, and Harley jumped around Will, alternating between rolling to encourage belly rubs and springing off Will's shoulders in excitement. Ellie and Zoe used their size to their advantage, tunneling under the legs of the bigger dogs to find spots on Will's legs to snuggle.

Buster bounced off Will's chest before frantically darting to bounce off Hannibal's shin. He repeated the maneuver several times before Hannibal bent down to scratch his ear. "Yes, I can see, I'll greet him when you're done."

After that Buster muscled his way past the bigger dogs to lay splayed on Will's lap, slapping at the empath to get his tummy scratched.

"We got tested and cleared to come back yesterday. Jack and I drove through the night so-" *so I could be with you*. It was true, but it felt like such a big thing to admit at 7:04 in the morning. Will looked up at Hannibal, who's eyes glinted in the early light as he observed the ruckus. "Thank you."

"It seems I was a poor substitute."

"No. Really, they looked great — do look great. You made them outfits?" Will plucked at the lilac buttons of Buster's waistcoat, but the little terrier squirmed away and ran back to Hannibal.

The doctor leaned down, scooping Buster up and gently adjusting the badly rumpled material. "Just a few outfits, so I could rotate their wardrobe in a reasonable manner."

Will tilted his head. "The sewing machine — you, you made these yourself?"

"Minor projects, I assure you, the waistcoats aren't lined." Hannibal frowned at Buster's back. "And a few of the seams don't lay flat without a good pressing."

Will stood. He wanted to give Hannibal a good pressing. He took a step forward, Hannibal's smile coiled as he matched Will's movements, stalking toward the empath. Will was a few feet away when he realized he was now coated in dog drool…with jerky breath. Fuck.

He took two steps back, then turned and refocused on the dogs. In the corner of his eye, he saw Hannibal's posture stiffen and the doctor walked gracefully past Will to the front door. "May I offer you a coffee or do you need to leave immediately?"

Will winced at the tone, he was back to interacting with the hollow socialite again. "I'd love coffee. Please."

When Hannibal opened the door, Will was amazed to watch all his dogs line up at the entryway and sit, save for Winston, who remained by Will's side. Hannibal returned to the doorway with a towel and wiped the paws of every dog one-by-one. They were then carefully stripped of their outfits, which were folded neatly over Hannibal's forearm. The doctor would dismiss them with a ruffle of their ears and the dog would barrel into the cavernous house.

Buster, who was the first to be wiped clean sat by Hannibal's feet, imperiously watching as the others were sanitized. Hannibal looked up, not at Will, but to his knee. "Winston? Come please, I need to make coffee."

Winston looked at Will for a moment before slowly walking to Hannibal and lifting his right paw. Once clean he trotted back to Will. Hannibal nodded and moved into the house, Buster still heeling beside him.

"We should go inside, huh?" Will patted Winston's head and ushered the dog through the door, taking a moment to wipe his own shoes before he set foot on Hannibal's pristine hardwood.

Will could hear noises emanating from the kitchen, but before he could follow Hannibal and explain himself, he caught sight of Hannibal's study. Seven cushions were arranged by the fire, he'd seen that before, but the rest of the room had altered as well. There still wasn't a speck of dog fur on any surface, but there was a basket filled with dog toys by Hannibal's chair and the sofas had little stairways leading up to the cushions. He watched, head tilting as Ellie ran up one of the stairways before flopping on the hand-embroidered cushion.

"She loves my divan," Hannibal said, making Will jump. The doctor immediately took a step back, and Will felt his gut sour.

"You got them stairs?"

"Their nails were havoc on the cushions when they attempted to jump up. Elinor would pull herself up and I'd find snags. This is a more elegant solution though I've yet to find one to prevent-" Hannibal gestured toward Jack, who scrambled past Ellie to a high back chair and threw himself into it, making the wooden legs screech against the hardwood. "…that."

Will shook his head. "You're nice things. I-"

"I was once in a position where a meager broth and a roof over my head were luxuries, Will. I think you'll find I'm adaptable to most situations."

Will paused. Hannibal had hinted about his grim childhood, and from what he'd found through FBI research, the doctor had spent at least a few years in an orphanage. He thought about the solemn little boy Hannibal would have been, high cheekbones and sunken eyes — too still for a little boy, never playing with others only ever observing them. Will knew what that felt like — he'd always longed to play with the other children, but they found him strange. Instead, he spent most recesses studying his classmates from afar, trying to unlock why they viewed him as "other."

He chanced a glance at Hannibal. "You shouldn't have to adapt, it's too much."

"Without adaptation, we can never evolve. I'm not content to trap myself in one set pattern, Will." Hannibal turned, heading for the kitchen. Will had an urge to reach out, grab him, but stood frozen on the spot. "Coffee should be ready momentarily."

Trailing slowly after Hannibal, Will entered the kitchen where Zoe and Harley slept quietly in the corner. Buster rounded the kitchen island, holding a gnawed shoe in his maw. Will's eyes were wide he grabbed for the shoe, chasing after the terrier as he backed away to Hannibal. "Buster. BUSTER! Drop it! Drop. It."

Hannibal turned and held a hand out. "It's fine, Will. We've agreed he can have the Gucci loafer as long as he leaves this season's Ferragamos alone."

Will blinked. "You…gave him the shoe?"

Hannibal nodded. "The one he selected the first night. He's been quite courteous about leaving the others alone."

Will stepped forward, his hands automatically reaching toward Hannibal. He stopped himself, clenching his fingers. Dog drool. He was covered in dog drool. "I'm…going to the bathroom."

He spun on his heel and fled, grabbing his duffle on the way and hoping Hannibal couldn't scent embarrassment. Once he was safely in the doctor's downstairs bathroom, he looked at himself in the mirror. His hair was wild, his skin was pale, and he definitely could use a shower.

With a sigh, Will started the water in the sink and stripped out of his shirt. He scrubbed his face and chest with Hannibal's amber-scented hand soap, splashing some water into his curls to press them down a bit. He scrubbed his teeth again with his finger, retrieving some mouthwash to gargle as he continued to scrub at his face. He toweled off using a grey piece of cotton that probably cost more than Will's first car.

When he was reasonably clean, Will dug through his bag for a blue Henley which was the least wrinkled item of clothing he owned at the moment. As he tugged it over his head, he noticed the bottles. Seven glass bottles were on the shelf above the bath, each labeled with one of his dogs' names. He jumped when he heard a knock.

"Will? Are you well? It's been 20 min-"

Will yanked the door open and looked at Hannibal with wide eyes. "Why are there bottles with the dogs' names on them?"

Hannibal tilted his head, his eyes traveling from Will's wet curls to his new shirt. The doctor's mouth coiled just slightly at the corner, his eyes slitting in mirth. "Did you clean up for me, Will?"

"Uh, yeah, I…a little," Will muttered, feeling like a little boy with a crush. He shook his head. "But the bottles, what are they?"

Hannibal stepped past Will into the bathroom, brushing against the empath's body. "Shampoos. I consulted with a veterinarian at CityPets and Marion to be sure of the formulations, of course."

Will's body flushed hot, he stepped closer to Hannibal, peering over his shoulder at the bottles. "But why one for each?"

Hannibal glanced over his shoulder, brow quirked. "Because they all have different needs. As a senior, Elinor needed something soothing, so I added lavender oil to her mixture. Max has a bad habit of chewing his paws, so there is chamomile oil in his shampoo to keep his feet more moisturized. And I don't need to tell you about Buster's dry skin issue, I'm sure, so I added a bit of jojoba oil to hi-"

Will couldn't take it anymore, he grabbed Hannibal by the collar spun him to face Will, and slammed the doctor into a wall. Without a thought in his head but *MINE*, Will threw himself onto Hannibal, connecting their mouths in a sloppy, desperate kiss.

Hannibal didn't respond at first, save for a slightly surprised noise. Will eased up on the kiss, moving to suck sweetly at Hannibal's lower lip while he waited for the doctor to reboot. It took three heartbeats. Then Hannibal had tilted his head to a better angle and opened his mouth to allow Will to lick inside. The kiss was slow, a wet drag of flesh as they explored each other. Hannibal's hands threading into Will's wet hair while Will clawed at the buttons on Hannibal's shirt.

They pulled back panting and smiling at each other, Hannibal lifting his chin just a fraction to kiss the tip of Will's nose. "Was it the chewed-up loafer or the shampoo that changed your mind?"

"My mind's been made up since I watched you wrestle with Buster." Will yanked at Hannibal's tie, loosening the knot as he gave the doctor another filthy kiss.

"You should see us squabble over the pillows on my bed," Hannibal whispered as he moved to bite Will's earlobe. "That's quite the display."

"He's gonna be pissed tonight," Will moaned, arching his neck as Hannibal began nipping at the flesh. "He's not sleeping in your bed."

Hannibal pulled back; his smile sharp-toothed. "I believe you wanted to take things slowly."

"Oh, it's gonna be slow, darlin'." Will smiled taking a step back. He'd had eleven days to think about what he wanted to do to Hannibal Lecter, longer really, months if he was being honest. "I'm gonna take my time until you're positively begging."

Hannibal's smile grew, teeth bared and eyes heated. "I'm unsure if that's a threat or a seduction, Will."

"Yes, I believe, is the answer to that." Will sank to his knees, leaning forward to nuzzle lightly at Hannibal's rapidly hardening cock. "That OK with you?"

Hannibal's mouth was open, he gazed down at Will with hooded eyes. He managed a nod, but no words. Will hummed nosing along the line of Hannibal's cock as he reached up to unbuckle the doctor's belt. He liked speechless Hannibal; he'd have to do this more often.

Freeing the leather from the belt buckle, Will began to work on Hannibal's button, mouthing a wet patch onto the front of his pressed trousers. He pawed at the material, liking the idea of sullying Hannibal, of being allowed to sully such a pristine creature.

"Will." Hannibal sounded breathless. His thighs tensed. "Will, the- Buster!"

Will broke from his daze, frowning at the mention of — *Oh*.

Will wasn't the only creature pawing at Hannibal's leg. Buster, it seemed, thought they were starting a game and wanted to be included. Will shoved at the little terrier, who only returned, trying to nose at Hannibal's cock. Jack and Zoe wandered into the bathroom, tails wagging as they tried to join the game.

"W-Will, I," Hannibal inhaled a great glut of air, his hands were fisted tightly by his sides. "As much as I've-"

"Yeah...uh..." Will glared at Buster, who pawed at Hannibal's thigh again. Harley nearly knocked Will over trying to investigate Hannibal's groin. "Bedroom. Now."

Hannibal nodded. They ran up the stairs, Hannibal clutching at his open pants and Will trying to drag the doctor up the steps two at a time, but the dogs were faster.

"Where?" Will found himself wading through fur, trying to tug Hannibal to his bed.

"Second door on the right," Hannibal said, looking weirdly dignified for a man who'd almost started a dog orgy.

Will finally opened the door to the right room, only to groan when the dogs streamed in. "Guys! Guys! OUT!"

Hannibal smiled slightly, watching Will shoo Zoe and Ellie out of the room as he finished removing his tie and shirt. Will's mouth went dry at the sight of Hannibal's chest, covered in a bramble of greying hair and flexing sturdy muscles — had this really been hiding under all those layers for so long? Hannibal cocked his head when he caught Will's eye. "I thought you liked dogs, Will."

Will glared, pulling his Henley over his head and throwing it in Hannibal's face.

"Shut up and get naked...Harley! Jack! GET OFF THE BED! OUT!" The two big dogs bowed in play pose, wagging their tails furiously at the new game. Will snapped, pointing at the door. Finally, Will herded the dogs out of the bedroom, leaning against the closed door to sigh. His eyes drifted to Hannibal slipping out of his trousers and underwear, thick cock ruddy against his thigh. The doctor smirked, turning to crawl onto the bed.

Will moved to join Hannibal when he heard a little growl. He looked down. A small paw had worked its way under the door and batted at Will's boots. "Goddamn it, Buster! STOP!"

The growl grew fiercer, two paws were now frantically digging at Hannibal's hardwood floor. Will opened his mouth, but Hannibal beat him to it.

“Buster Graham! Daddy has been waiting a very long time for this — please go downstairs!”

The paw retreated, as did the sound of Buster growling. Will would almost be mad it worked if his cock wasn’t so hard.

He grinned instead, hopping as he tugged out of his boots. “Waited a long time for this, huh?”

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. “I was referring to you.”

“Oh, were you?” Will couldn’t keep the dopey grin from his face as he wiggled out of his jeans. “I’m not the one who let seven dogs in my house just to get laid.”

Hannibal glared, but his mouth formed a soft curve. “It was the right thing to do. I couldn’t abandon them to the wilds of Virginia.”

“Oh yes,” Will nodded, scrunching his face with faux concern. He crawled onto the bed, Hannibal reaching for him. “You’re all about doing the right thing, aren’t you, Hannibal?”

Hannibal’s hands hesitated. “Perhaps not the right thing, but I am trying to mend what was shattered.”

Will captured Hannibal’s hand before it retreated. There was so much to talk about. Jack, Abigail, Beverly, how they were going to extricate themselves from Baltimore… Will kissed Hannibal’s fingers.

“Will you be honest with me?” Will pulled back with a smile. “It should be clear I’m not wearing a wire.”

“Yes.” Hannibal’s body was still, his whole being seemed focused on Will.

“Admit it.”

“I’m the Ripper,” There was no hesitation, no shame. Hannibal’s eyes ticked down. He licked his lips. “I’m also the copycat killer who showed you Cassie Boyle and Il Monstro if we ever journey to Italy.”

“Il mons-” Will shook his head, filing that tidbit away for a Google search. There were more important things to say. “Will you let me turn you in?”

Hannibal snarled, but after a flash of hurt, his eyes closed. “Yes.”

Will bent forward, cradling Hannibal’s hand to his chest. He brushed his nose against Hannibal’s, let the doctor scent his pulse and his blood. Giving him the chance to strike. Hannibal stayed still beneath Will. The empath smiled, whispering in Hannibal’s ear. “What if I asked you to run with me? Would you do that?”

Hannibal's eyes flew open, he grabbed Will immediately pinning him to the bed and looking at him with awe. "Will."

"The dogs would have to come, and there couldn't be any more ostentatious displays… no tasteless taunting that will get us caught." Will looked up, smiling at the tears he saw in Hannibal's eyes. "Our kills will have to lack your signature style. But we could build something together. Something…"

"Beautiful," Hannibal whispered, sealing their bargain with a kiss. Will wrapped his hands around Hannibal's back, feeling the powerful muscles below stretch as they kissed. His fingers dipped lower, trailing down Hannibal's spine, tracing the elegant line with a soft finger. Will palmed Hannibal's ass, rocking the doctor into him, moaning at the feel of his wet cock smearing along his thigh. Hannibal rumbled at the attention, kisses growing fiercer as he pinned Will to the bed.

But Will knew enough of wild things to realize he shouldn't be pinned. Not their first time. Digging in a heel, Will shoved, using Hannibal's surprise and the leverage of his body weight to put Hannibal on his back. Hannibal watched Will, eyes black and glittering. Will smiled stroking along Hannibal's cheek and letting his thumb trace the curve of the doctor's snarl. There was no bite, Hannibal's lip softened as Will continued to stroke it.

"There you are, darlin', there you are," Will cooed, slipping between Hannibal's thighs. He smiled when Hannibal automatically wrapped a leg around Will's hip, encouraging him forward. "Now I told you I wanted to go slow, and that's how we're gonna go this time."

Will leaned forward, his cock rubbing along Hannibal's in a slow slide. Hannibal hissed beneath him, fingers digging into Will's hips, trying to grind him down — harder, faster. Will was gone in a flash, one strong hand in the center of Hannibal's chest, to keep him to the bed. "Do I have to tie you up, Hannibal? Or can you stay where I put you?"

Hannibal grinned, Will could feel his furry chest heaving under his fingers. "Are you training me, Will?"

Will tugged at the hair on his chest before trailing his nails up Hannibal's neck and tapping on his chin. He pressed down, bending Hannibal's head to look at him. "Do you need a firm hand, Hannibal?"

Hannibal's smile grew just a fraction before he snapped, catching Will's finger in sharp teeth. There was no pressure, no pain, just the solid feeling of being caught in the jaws of a cannibal. Will shivered, his hips jerking involuntarily. "Let me have this, Hannibal. And the next time, I'll let you have your teeth."

The doctor's teeth pressed down for just a moment, the burst of pain making Will moan. But then the teeth were gone, replaced with soft lips and tongue, laving and sucking at Will's fingers. With a groan, Will pulled his fingers from Hannibal's mouth, before falling into another filthy kiss. Hannibal didn't try to roll them this time, content to have Will grinding on top of him as the empath plundered his mouth.

When they pulled apart, Will bit lightly at Hannibal's chin. "Lie still, now, darlin'. I need to check out a few things."

Will settled on his knees between Hannibal's splayed legs, taking in the magnificent beast that lay prone before him. He petted Hannibal's chest, scratching lightly through his chest hair before rubbing each nipple slowly between his fingers. He smiled when Hannibal shivered, the doctor's cock twitching at his thigh.

"Well hell, you're just beautiful, aren't you?" Hannibal groaned slightly, making Will raise an eyebrow. "Oh, you do love being admired, don't you? Handsome charming Dr. Lecter, absolutely beautiful until he tears out your throat."

Will paused, letting a finger tease at Hannibal's foreskin, dipping slightly to brush over the wet head. "Or maybe you're beautiful then, too. I bet you're a sight all covered in blood, chest heaving. Will you show me, Hannibal?"

The doctor nodded, licking his lips as he watched Will. Leaning forward, Will trailed sloppy kisses along Hannibal's soft stomach, smiling when he felt the muscles tense beneath his skin. Will bit at the flesh, rubbed his beard against the skin just below Hannibal's navel until it turned pink.

"Will." Hannibal's fingers found his hair, his voice gone rough.

Sinking lower, Will hummed, brushing his nose against the base of Hannibal's cock. The doctor made a choking noise, body straining as Will traced the tip of his tongue along the underside. He smiled at his monster. He'd been told to lie still, and he was, though there was a slight tremor running through his powerful body.

Such an obedient monster.

"Now Hannibal, I know you can do better than that," Will dipped down to lip at Hannibal's foreskin, carefully teasing it up before slipping his tongue beneath it. Hannibal keened, the fingers in Will's hair sinking their claws into his scalp. "That's better. I want to hear you, OK?"

Hannibal nodded.

Will shook his head, his lower lip brushing against Hannibal's weeping cock with each pass. "Try again."

"Yessss Will." The fingers in Will's scalp flexed again, and Will grinned opening his mouth to take Hannibal to the back of his throat. The noise Hannibal emitted was ungodly; faintly, Will registered a few of the dogs barking in confusion at the sound. He'd soothe them later, now he had a bigger beast to focus on.

Will swallowed, letting his mouth get slick and sloppy as he worked Hannibal. It had been years since he'd done this, but the actions came flooding back into his mind. Hannibal's hips were rocking, not enough to properly fuck his mouth, but enough to know that Will had snapped some of the iron control the doctor so prided himself on. He pulled back to tease the

head with his tongue, watching Hannibal under fluttering lashes as he lapped at the man's cock like a whore.

Hannibal barely looked human anymore. His hooded eyes were black and sightless. His red snarling mouth was panting. Every muscle seemed coiled and ready to strike. Will had never seen anything so gorgeous in his life.

Will bared his teeth at Hannibal, carefully sliding them along the doctor's shaft, before catching his foreskin and softly tugging. Hannibal's head fell back, a shuddering noise shaking free of his lungs. Will could feel his body tense and grabbed the base of Hannibal's cock hard. Hannibal snarled, letting go of Will's hair to claw at the sheets.

Will cocked his head, watching. "You think you have two in you?"

Hannibal's eyes narrowed, lip curing higher, he nodded.

With a smile Will released Hannibal, hand slipping lower to his perineum before pressing firmly. "Guess we'll see."

He sucked the head of Hannibal's cock into his mouth again, careless with his teeth as he stroked the base with his right hand. Hannibal roared, feet planting on the bed as he arched up, shoving his cock as far into Will as the empath would allow. It was awkward to swallow, but Will managed, easing the pressure as Hannibal sank back into the sheets.

With soft fingers, Will stroked the heaving skin of Hannibal's belly, trying to soothe as Hannibal pulled himself together. Will found himself humming, fingers tangling in the light trail of hair that led to Hannibal's groin. "Shhh, we can take a break and-"

Will started when something hit him dead in the chest. He looked down, a container of lube rolling to settle in the tangle of sheets.

"I'm slightly older than you but not infirm," Hannibal growled, mustering up as much dignity as a panting man could.

"I'm not going to fuck you until you're hard again." Will's smile was sharp-toothed. He opened the container and slicked a finger. Settling over Hannibal's hip, Will made himself comfortable. Then, just to watch Hannibal frown he added. "Careful of your hip, old man."

He waited for Hannibal to open his mouth, a sneer and a remark on his tongue, before he pressed his finger inside. Whatever Hannibal had to say was lost, but his mouth remained open. Will's mouth fell open as well — the heat of Hannibal, the all-consuming fire that seemed to surround Will's hand – Will had never wanted to burn so badly in his life

"Will." Hannibal stretched the name as he arched, pushing his hips down on Will's hands. "Please, Will."

Adding a second finger, Will began to scissor his fingers, watching carefully how his monster reacted to the stretch. He studied Hannibal as he moved his fingers, learning the pressure and strokes that drew desperate little noises from the man below him. Finally, Will

crooked his fingers, gently stroking until he found Hannibal's prostate. Edging his fingers around the nub, Will began to rub firmly.

Hannibal's cock twitched. Will smiled as it began to fill, Hannibal moaning like a wounded thing under Will's attention. "Your thigh's shaking, darlin', you like that?"

Hannibal fisted the sheets, hips rolling helplessly as he sought Will's fingers. Sitting up, Will used his left hand to lightly fist Hannibal's cock, thumbing back the foreskin to rub little circles just under the head. Hannibal's body snapped taught as if shocked, his only movements a small tremor in his thighs and loud keening that quaked his powerful chest.

Will chuckled. "Look at those pretty toes curling, Hannibal. I think you might be ready."

"Will," Elegant hands grabbed for Will, clumsily trying to pull the empath closer. He smiled at the wild thing beneath him, person suit gone, only snapping teeth and need left. "Please, Will. I- I need-"

Will bent down, licking a slow strip up Hannibal's hard cock, just to hear another beautiful plea from those soft lips. He pulled back, earning a moan. He grabbed for the jar of lube with shaking hands, slicking himself quickly as he cooed nonsense at Hannibal about how wonderful he was.

Hitching Hannibal's leg over his hip, Will pressed his cock to Hannibal's winking hole, his mouth watering at the fluttering against his sensitive head. "Ask me again, Hannibal."

"Will, please," Hannibal panted, hands scrabbling to stroke Will's chest. "Please…take me."

Will pushed forward, plunging into the heat of Hannibal's body. He gasped, Hannibal overwhelming his senses. He was unmoored, surrounded by heat and sensation. A hand reached out, anchoring Will at the base of his head, tenderly drawing him down. He could feel Hannibal's breath on his face, taste the thick air between them.

"My darling," Hannibal whispered, the words caressing over Will's face. He let himself be pulled the scant inches to Hannibal's mouth. The kiss was unbearably soft, but Will focused on breathing all his love and wants into Hannibal.

When they broke apart, Will saw tears tracking down Hannibal's cheeks. He smiled, shifting to trail his lips through them, softly kissing them from the doctor's skin. "I knew you'd weep."

"How can I resist, in the presence of such beauty?"

Will kissed him again, lips salty and sweet. "I love you."

Fresh tears flowed from Hannibal's eyes, even as the monster bared his teeth in a crooked smile. "Show me, darling. Show me."

Will rolled his hips, starting a slow, deep rhythm as he claimed his monster. Hannibal moaned, throat rough and tears still spilling from his eyes. Will was lost to the feeling, the heat of Hannibal, the beauty of his monster's joy, the feeling of claws sinking into his back whenever he angled his thrusts perfectly.

Leaning on his elbow, Will stroked Hannibal's face, tracing the lines of pleasure that formed as the doctor cried out beneath him. His thumb dipped into Hannibal's mouth, the pad tracing over sharp uneven teeth. "So open for me. So fucking beautiful."

Will rubbed his wet thumb along Hannibal's bottom lip, drawing it down. "You tore me to pieces, you know. I was shredded in that cell, shredded and waiting for you to come and patch me up."

Will reached down, grabbing Hannibal's thigh and hitching it wider, higher. His monster was so open beneath him, writhing and wailing as Will thrust. He could feel himself nearing the edge, his body pooling liquid and hot at the base of his spine. Each roll of Will's hips seemed to draw him taut, ready to spill. "And now, now I've shredded you, Hannibal. Taken you to pieces and laid you beneath me."

"Will." Hannibal chanted his name, he was clawing senselessly at Will's back, thrashing with every thrust. Will pressed himself down on each thrust, his belly rubbing at Hannibal's leaking cock.

"We've broken each other, darlin'," Will rasped, digging his nails into Hannibal's thigh. "Now all that's left is putting ourselves back together. Come on, Hannibal. Fall with me and let's see what we make."

Hannibal howled again, body shivering as he came. He clenched hard around Will, who did his level best to fuck Hannibal through the most violent moments of pleasure before succumbing himself. Will's thrusts grew sloppy, he mouthed at Hannibal's cheek, smearing endearments as he came. Hannibal's legs wrapped around Will's back, anchoring the empath to his body as they trembled together.

When Will's sweat began to cool, he attempted to shift, only to have Hannibal band his arms around Will's back.

Will laughed, a helpless little huff by Hannibal's ear. "You know, the fusing together thing was just a metaphor."

"Only if I release you." Hannibal nuzzled into Will's neck,

"So, this is it, huh? All those pretty words and death and what we get is — two sweaty men fused together by come?" Hannibal's leg dropped, his arms shifted and suddenly Will was being pushed up and away into the very unwelcoming cold air of the bedroom. "Oh come on! I'm just saying, it's going to be hard to walk the dogs if I'm balancing you on my co- HEY! I'M GOING TO FALL OFF THE BED!"

"Good." Hannibal glared. He wasn't nearly as frightening with crazy sex hair and a fresh orgasm flush over his chest.

Will flailed, smiling when Hannibal caught him and pulled him to his chest rather than let him fall onto the floor. “Am I forgiven?”

“Am I?” There was something dark and breakable in Hannibal’s stare, it made Will’s chest ache.

“One of the hazards of taming wild things is catching their teeth every now and then.” Will stroked a hand through Hannibal’s unruly hair. “Don’t bite me without permission again, Hannibal.”

“Never.” Barely a whisper, but the declaration rang in Will’s ears.

He pulled away to stand, holding out a hand to Hannibal. “Come on, let’s get showered and then we can open the door before Buster claws a hole in it.”

“What?” Hannibal looked down and smiled — a little white paw was jammed under the door swiping frantically. Hannibal laughed, letting Will haul him up and into another kiss. “He’s going to be upset about the new sleeping arrangements.”

“He’ll adjust.”

“Perhaps if I bring his bed in here-”

Will stopped, staring at the doctor. “I’ve created a monster.”

Hannibal grinned, sharp-toothed and feral. “You were curious what new thing our shattered teacups would form.”

Will nodded, eyebrows high. “I was curious, but I never thought it’d be a dog bowl.”

Hannibal swatted at Will, chasing him into the bathroom.

Chapter End Notes

Next Up:
So...anyone remember Alana?

Day 61

Chapter Summary

Will and Hanners look toward the future, and remember Alana...

Chapter Notes

This has been a long ride, huh? I want to thank everyone who read/kudos/commented! I know 16 weeks is a long commitment.

As always, my undying love goes to Gwilbers for catching all my errors and more undying love to Ishxallxgood who keeps me focused and doesn't hate me for taking two years to write a fic...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will woke up to the sound of sniffing near his ear. He groaned smiling as his brain slowly blinked back online. They'd spent most of the day and all of the night finding new and inventive ways to drive each other crazy; he supposed morning sex wasn't the worst thing to add to the list. He burrowed deeper into Hannibal's sheets, smiling muzzily as he murmured. "Did you just smell me, Dr. Lecter?"

He was not expecting the lick directly into his ear canal.

Forcing an eye open and wincing into the daylight, Will frowned at Buster. "He put you on the goddamn bed, didn't he?"

Buster circled a few times before settling with his nose on Hannibal's abandoned pillow, and his ass in Will's face. Will blinked, yawning. "Enjoy this, buddy, because the sleeping arrangements are changing starting today and your little ass is going to find a dog bed."

Buster didn't respond. Will sighed and scratched the little terrier's back. Why did he love such shitty creatures? He had just about decided to search for pants and then Hannibal when he heard a clattering of paws heading his way.

Hannibal breezed into the bedroom, hair a fright and pajama pants low on his hips, holding a wooden tray with golden hardware on it. Will squinted. "Is that for me or Buster?"

The doctor cocked his head, offering an unimpressed look that was frighteningly similar to the little terrier. “Buster and the rest of the pack have already eaten.”

Hannibal waited for Will to sit up, bolstering himself with a mountain of decorative pillows, before laying the tray across his lap. He smiled at the dish, looking up. “A protein scramble.”

“Our first meal.”

“The first of many.” Will took a sip of coffee, letting it warm him down to his toes. “You know, I’d rather share this with you than Buster.”

Hannibal smiled, bending to steal a kiss before moving to his side of the bed. He grabbed Buster, nuzzling the dog’s head before sitting him on the floor. Will was about to scold Hannibal for blatant favoritism, but the criticism was lost when the doctor scooted closer, kissing his bare shoulder before stealing a sip of his coffee.

“You’re in a good mood,” Will let his cheek be kissed as he ate the protein scramble. He offered Hannibal a bite. “Anything you want to share?”

Hannibal hummed, chin resting on Will’s shoulder. “Terrible news, I’m afraid the governor has extended his shelter-in-place order for another few weeks.”

Will grinned around a forkful of fluffy eggs. “So, it’s probably illegal if I left this house.”

“Oh undoubtedly.”

“Think you can tolerate us for another month?” Will dunked a fresh biscotti into his coffee, crumbs littering the bed when he bit into it.

“The dogs are no trouble.” Hannibal sighed, his mouth forming a firm line. He brushed at the crumbs with his hand. “You, however, could stand some work.”

Will bit into the biscotti again, sending another cascade of crumbs onto Hannibal’s hand just to watch the doctor glare. “Will I need a lot of positive reinforcement?”

“You believe in positive reinforcement.” Hannibal took the napkin from the tray and tied the piece of linen around Will’s neck. The firm pressure at his throat made Will’s cock stir in faint interest. “I’ve always found negative reinforcement to be more effective.”

Will raised an eyebrow. “Eating someone would get your point across.”

“I was thinking more along the lines of a good spanking, but we’ll see how poorly you behave.”

“Think you can train me, Dr. Lecter?” Will’s whole body lit up at the idea of Hannibal’s broad hand pounding across his prone ass. Will licked his lips, meeting Hannibal’s eyes before he picked up his coffee cup and poured it on the bedspread. The fire that sparked in Hannibal’s eyes was utterly beautiful.

“No.” Hannibal knocked the tray off Will’s lap, grabbing the younger man and pinning him to the mattress. His teeth caught just slightly on Will’s neck before Hannibal licked his way up to Will’s ear. “But I believe attempting it will be great fun.”

Will laughed, letting Hannibal press him further into coffee-scented sheets.

Max whined by the front door, paws tapping. Will fussed with the buttons on a lavender shirt, a size too big and smelling like Hannibal, as the other dogs milled around his legs.

“Apologies for the late start everyone,” Hannibal breezed by Will, perfectly quaffed and neat, as if he hadn’t spent the last 45 minutes pounding Will into the mattress. “I’m afraid we were delayed, but we shall take a lengthy walk to make up for our tardiness.”

Delayed. Will could see the hickey he left on Hannibal’s neck. It was a hell of a delay.

Hannibal moved to the closet, pulling seven hangers off the rack. Will blinked. Prussian blue waistcoats that matched Hannibal’s shirt for the boys, and ruffled lavender coats for the girls. Will looked down at his own shirt in mild horror. “You dressed me like the dogs?”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Hannibal sniffed. He snapped and made a hand signal. Seven dogs sat quietly before him. He put Winston in his waistcoat. “I’m dressing the dogs like you.”

“You’re a lot sometimes, you know that?”

“You’ve told me.” Hannibal smoothed the wrinkles in Max’s waistcoat before slipping Ellie’s paw through a ruffled sleeve. He glanced up at Will, eyes dancing. “I believe your exact phrasing was *so fucking big, so fucking good*?”

Will sneered, but it was hard to stay mad at a man who was currently cooing at Buster, slipping him into a lavender waistcoat. “Wait. I thought the boys were wearing blue?”

“The dogs you’re walking are wearing blue. I’m walking the dogs in lavender.” Hannibal frowned mildly at Will. “The palette would be off if I had a dog in Prussian-”

Will grabbed Hannibal by his lavender tie and hauled him upright, pressing a hot kiss to the doctor’s mouth. Hannibal let himself be kissed against the closet door for a few moments before pulling away. “It’s rude to interrupt someone, even with a kiss.”

Will tugged Hannibal’s tie, grinning at how easily the doctor was pulled back to his lips. “You don’t mind, though, do you?”

Hannibal’s mouth twitched. Will watched Hannibal war with his persnickety code of values and his desire to fuck Will Graham on every surface that would sustain their weight. Will must have come out on top, because the doctor merely narrowed his eyes, then went back to dressing the dogs.

When Hannibal finished outfitting the dogs and attaching their leashes, the doctor distributed treats to the pack, praising their manners. Hannibal held up a face mask to Will — Prussian blue to match Max, Harley, Jack, and Winston. Will thought again of the hard, clear plastic that cut into his face when he was at BSHCI, how it fogged and grew wet when his breath picked up. He hesitated.

"Will?"

"I told myself I wouldn't let you put me in one of these again."

Hannibal's mouth tightened, his posture going still. "Seeing you muzzled by the courts or by myself made me uncomfortable as well. If it distresses you, leave it off. It's only required for trips into essential businesses."

Will nodded, putting the scrap of fabric in his pocket. "Maybe later, if we go shopping."

Hannibal bowed his head, handing the bigger dogs' leashes to Will. "I wouldn't mind doing the shopping if it still-"

Will put a hand on Hannibal's chest. "Some wounds need time; you can't just accommodate them away."

"I know."

"Then stop trying to direct the breaking of the teacup," Will managed a small smile. "It's what got us in trouble last time."

Hannibal's eyes warmed, he took Will's offered hand and left the house.

Five blocks into their walk, Will marveled at how easily the dogs stayed in step with them. Max and Buster would occasionally bark at a squirrel, Winston and Ellie would casually sniff, but overall they were model citizens. Hannibal had once again adapted to his environment, then made the environment adapt to his tastes.

Even picking up dog droppings had a Hannibal flare, as he watched the doctor produce a biodegradable bag from his pocket like a magician, praise Harley for doing his business, and then swoop down in a perfect arabesque to bag the mound. Will stared at him, mouth open as Hannibal's leg rose above his head to counterbalance the movement. It gave him ideas about the doctor's flexibility. Ideas that probably shouldn't be provoked while the man in question was holding a neatly tied baggie of shit.

Hannibal merely offered Will a small smirk, depositing the bag in a corner trashcan before resuming his walk. "Do you have thoughts about my disposal methods?"

"Oh, I have thoughts." Will nudged Hannibal, falling into step with him. "How high does that leg go?"

"How high do you want it?"

Will ducked his head, laughing to himself as the moved on, circling the block and heading for home.

“You know, I rarely walk them on leashes,” Will admitted. “It’s more fun to watch them go wild.”

“I confess, I’d like to see them unconstrained.” Hannibal looked at Will fondly. “It’s always more fun when nature is embraced instead of restrained by societal laws.”

Will hummed. Hannibal, however, hesitated.

“Will, would you…like to shelter in place somewhere else?”

Will frowned. “Like my house? You’d go nuts in my kitchen. You wouldn’t even-”

“I have another property.” Hannibal’s tone had changed, something in it made Will’s skin prickle. “It’s by the sea, there’s a path down to a private beach. Perhaps we could go on family walks?”

Will’s brain caught on a word. “Family?”

“I, there are things we should discuss.”

He pictured Abigail Hobbs, the daughter he’d earned in blood and lost the same way. Will thought of Jack Crawford, of the tacit warning that they would need to flee. “We do have things to talk about.”

“It will take a few hours to reach the house, we could talk on the way?”

Will nodded, still churning the word over and over in his mind. He stopped dead, the dogs tugging him when his feet rooted to the pavement. “Family.”

Hannibal was watching him now, carefully assessing him the way he did when they first met. Will closed his eyes and remembered the feeling of retching into the kitchen sink. The wet slap the ear made when it hit metal. An ear…Hannibal had known Will could see him, but he wanted Will to hear him too. So he’d taken away all distractions, including their child…hadn’t he?

“Family?” It was a whisper now.

Hannibal raised his chin in assent. “One that would thrive in a change of venue.”

Will wiped at his eyes with the back of his hand. “Another piece of broken china to join the kintsugi?”

“Imagine the possibilities.”

Will took Hannibal’s hand. He could see the possibilities stretched before him, beautiful and fierce, and full of love.

Buster tired about two blocks from Hannibal's house and began to limp. Predictably, Hannibal bent and scooped the terrier into his arms, but Will could do nothing but smile.

"Good morning, Dr. Lecter!" An older woman was watering her garden box as they walked by. She smiled and waved at them. "I see you have some help with the dogs today!"

Hannibal nodded, his chest puffing just a bit as he adjusted Buster in his arms. "Good morning Judge McKinnon! I'm in luck! Their owner is home!"

Will waved at the woman, wrapping an arm around Hannibal's waist.

"Yeah, he is," Will whispered, flushing hot when Hannibal offered him a guileless crooked smile.

Hannibal promised to email the judge his recipe for stewed persimmons. Will could laugh at how normal this crazed cannibal was. Just a man walking his dogs, complimenting his neighbor's begonias.

They slowed when they reached Hannibal's driveway, a strange car blocking the entrance. Will looked at Hannibal, who sighed before stepping forward.

"Alana?"

The car door opened and Alana stepped out, holding her cellphone aloft and looking furious.

"Dearest Alana, though I've enjoyed our time together, it must come to an end," she read, then looked up. "You wish me happiness in my future endeavors?"

Hannibal's back straightened, shoulders back, Buster still in his arms while Ellie and Zoe sat at his feet. "I see you got my text."

"You ignore me for weeks only to send me th-" Alana's mouth fell open. "YOU'RE BREAKING UP WITH ME OVER TEXT?"

"I'm extremely sorry for the method, but it is a global pandemic. Contact should be limited," Hannibal said reasonably. He smiled. "Also, it's been a very busy morning."

Will cast a side-long glance at Hannibal, wondering if he sent the text before or after he rimmed Will until the younger man sobbed.

"Will?" Alana turned, seeming to just realize he was there. "You're home? Why haven't you answered my texts? I called you four times."

"I've been busy too."

Alana's brow furrowed. "Doing what? You were trapped in Chicago with Jack Craw-"

Will smiled, watching Alana's eyes trace over him and Hannibal. She took in the outfits, the dogs, the body language. Her pretty face morphed from consternation to

confusion to cold fury. She turned back to Hannibal. “You’ve got to be kidding me, he’s a patient.”

“He’s not,” dismissed Hannibal.

“You could lose your license over-”

“He won’t,” Will interrupted. Though, he supposed it wouldn’t really matter once they left Baltimore anyway. “Jack Crawford is aware of the relationship and I’m sure would testify that Hannibal hasn’t been my caregiver on record for-”

Alana shook her head. “This is insane. You told everyone who would listen he’s the Chesapeake Ripper!”

“And no one did listen,” Will tilted his head, “except for Hannibal.”

Hannibal smiled, the tight, polite expression that never reached his eyes. “You told everyone Will was dangerously unstable, but he’s forgiven you.”

Alana’s rage had ebbed, she offered Will a hurt look instead. “You warned me he was dangerous.”

“Right now, the biggest danger is you breaking quarantine. I believe the Governor has said it’s not safe to gather with people who aren’t members of your household.” Will stepped closer to Hannibal. “I’d hate for you to endanger yourself, Alana.”

Something shifted in Alana’s expression, she looked afraid — not of Hannibal, of Will. “I’m going to report this.”

Will wanted to roll his eyes. Alana was always so concerned with reporting things when it suited her. Where was this need to help when Will was begging her for support?

“I would never come between you and your conscience, Alana,” Hannibal said evenly. He seemed bored with the whole interaction.

“I’m surprised you came at all,” muttered Will, earning an amused snort from Hannibal.

Alana’s eyes widened, then her expression hardened. “I can see I was wrong about you. Both of you.”

She climbed back into her car and slammed the door. Will waved as the car peeled from the driveway.

Hannibal watched Will for a moment before steering them toward the house. “You weren’t very charitable to Alana, Will. She’s had quite a shock.”

“Why should I be charitable?” Will raised an eyebrow at Hannibal. “She left my dogs with a serial killer.”

Hannibal laughed, that silly high-pitched noise that Will had come to love before ushering Will into the house. They had a long journey ahead of them, it was time to pack.

Chapter End Notes

Next Up:

Ish helped me with a twitter poll. So it looks like next up is a fic about Hannibal interrupting Will in the shower CONSTANTLY post-fall. Hope to see you all there!

End Notes

As always, this fic is complete and I'll be posting Wednesdays

Next Up:
Hannibal tries to feed the dogs. Will sees a bit more of Jack and Bella's marriage. Shameless flirting continues.

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